

SLAVERY IN COLONIAL NEW YORK CITY

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ABSTRACT

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Blacks arrived in chains on Manhattan Island only a half-dozen years after the first slave cargo in Jamestown, Virginia. By 1698 one of every seven persons in New York City was an enslaved black, and the ratio rose as high as one-to-five before the outbreak of the War of American Independence. At the close of the colonial period New York City's population contained more slaves than any other American city except Charleston, South Carolina. Thus, slavery in colonial New York City was one of the oldest and largest urban slave regimes in early America.

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The Dutch introduced slavery and the English expanded the institution. To both groups slavery was an economic advantage. For too few settlers immigrated to the colony and chose the life of wage laborers to satisfy its demand for workers. To take up the slack, employers recruited white indentured servants, but there was an economically cheaper alternative--Negro slavery. Society continually tried to restrain them, but the slaves continually resist. Slavery began simply as a substitute system for unavailable white labor, but it grew into much more. For if it stocked the



society with invaluable labor and saved employers money, slavery also had consequences for the community. By introducing an obviously repressed group into the community, slavery compelled the City to act on its most serious problem--social control.

Slaves proved difficult to discipline. Many rejected authority, at every opportunity circumventing the society's rules and restraints. At times, such as in 1712 and 1741, they boldly confronted the society. Simply put, enslaving blacks in New York City did not work wholly as whites intended. It helped solve the labor shortage, but it produced its own problems. These were largely in labor and race relations, and the two sets reinforced one another.

For blacks to remain in a white society required it to institutionalize not only their status as laborers but, also, their peculiarity as persons. They were doubly ostracised, cut off from all other laborers and from all other persons.

But the decision to discriminate did not itself ensure enforcement, and blacks crossed the lines drawn by law. Society continually tried to restrain them, but the slaves continually resisted, creating constant pressures upon whites. When the population ratio lessened, so did the pressure. Increased white



immigration removed the conditions which had initiated slavery in the labor market. Further, white workingmen felt slavery prejudiced their own interests through competition and decided slavery had to end--as a labor system. They had no interest, however, in ending it as a social system.

This study traces slavery as it worked its way into the fabric of colonial New York City. It weaved itself to such a point that contemporaries considered the complement of slaves commonplace, even while behavior of blacks excited controversy throughout the community. The study begins with introduction of Africans, traces the development of the legal institution of slavery by the English, and continues to its legal abolition. It deals with slaves breaking down social control by revolt and by more subtle and commonplace means. It probes the perennial problem of slave crime. It examines the forces of slave life. It describes the movement for emancipation and its aftermath. It indicates that from the beginning the central problem of black-white relations in New York City was social control.



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## INTRODUCTION

"Cities," as Mark Jefferson wrote, "do not grow up of themselves. Countrysides set them up to do tasks that must be performed in central places."<sup>1</sup> The bottom tip of Manhattan Island was, from the beginning, a central place, first for Dutch settlement and, later, for the English. The community--called Nieu Amsterdam until the English conquest in 1664--served as the seat of provincial government, as the harbor for imports and exports, and as the principle market for produce. It was a complex of activities and ideas, and influences and interests emanated from it. Buildings and inhabitants grew in number; the area they compassed expanded; activities increased in frequency, variety and scope. By the standards of the time, the community certainly was urban before the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> Urbanism showed in the character of life, in its organization, and in its problems.

<sup>1</sup> Mark Jefferson, "The World City Folks," Geographical Review, 21 (1931), 453.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742 (New York, 1955), 251.



1.

Negro slavery was part of New York City's problems from the beginning. Introduced for economic advantage in an experiment to solve a labor shortage, slavery powerfully influenced the City by involving it with a different and unknown people who became an imposition everywhere in the society. The blacks tested the colonial city-folk and provoked continual changes in regulations and relations. Ulrich B. Phillips described slavery as a school:<sup>1</sup> if the analogy fits, owners as well as slaves, whites as well as blacks, learned in that school. Owners learned that if slaves saved economic costs, by the same token, they increased social costs. Whites learned they could not absolutely subjugate blacks, for they could not effectively combat many conditions attached to the troublesome presence. For slaveowners and for the society-at-large, this fostered troubles which were part of the basic problem of the City--achieving effective social control.

New York City was the center of the North's largest slaveholding. Yet there is no comprehensive history of the institution's development in the City, a development that occurred almost exclusively during the colonial period. By 1790 the surroundings that nurtured slavery in the colonial City had changed although no emancipation act had yet been passed. The percentage of slaves in the population was at an all time low for the eighteenth century. It was then

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Life and Labor in the Old South (New York, 1929), 198-201, 362-363.



7.4 percent; only twenty years earlier the percentage was 15.8-- more than doubled (see Table 1.1). Blacks no longer were available

Table 1.1--Percentage of New York City's total population enslaved 1698-1771

Year	Percentage enslaved
1698	14.2
1703	14.4
1723	18.8
1731	18.3
1737	16.1
1746	20.9
1749	17.8
1756	17.5
1771	15.8

Source: Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790 (New York, 1932), 88-105.

for sale as easily and cheaply as before. No longer was there a lack of white laborers for which to substitute slaves. More and more white immigrants clamored for work. White workingmen almost in unison shouted against slavery and within a generation forcefully displayed their antipathy against both slavery and blacks. Many who had the means to own slaves morally opposed the institution, and their sons and grandsons marched in the antebellum antislavery crusade. Thus, Negro slavery shadowed New York City from its



founding and left a legacy of associations and attitudes no less important there than in the world the slaveholders made southward.<sup>1</sup>

The significance of slavery in New York City has been neglected however. Although slavery has been a perennial topic in American historiography, it has been treated mostly as an institution related to the coming and aftermath of the American Civil War. Such treatment virtually confined its frame of reference to the South and the antebellum period. Furthermore, it concentrated attention on the predominant mode of slavery in the antebellum South--the plantation regime.<sup>2</sup>

Slavery in the North and during the colonial period was almost forgotten, as was slavery in the cities. For instance, of sixty-seven doctoral dissertations on American Negro slavery written in history at American universities between 1873 and 1971, only five specifically treated slavery in the North and four others slavery during the colonial era. Not one dissertation treated slavery in

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Eugene D. Genovese, The World The Slaveholders Made (New York, 1973); Gerald Sorin, New York Abolitionists: A Cast Study of Political Radicalism (Westport, Conn., 1971); Linda K. Kerber, "Abolitionists and Amalgamators: The New York City Race Riots of 1834," New York History, 48 (1967), 28-39.

2

For a quick review of the historiography see Kenneth Stampp, "The Historian and Southern Negro Slavery," American Historical Review, 57 (1952), 613-624; Stanley Elkins, "Slavery," (Chicago, 1959), Introduction; Frank Otto Gatell and Allen Weinstein, eds., American Negro Slavery (New York, 1968); and Laura Foner and Eugene Genovese, eds., Slavery in the New World (Englewood Cliffs, 1969).



the city. Thus, a topic such as slavery in colonial New York City existed in a neglected area of study.<sup>1</sup>

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The dissertations on slavery in the North are Henry S. Cooley, "A Study of Slavery in New Jersey" (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, Johns Hopkins Univ., 1896); Edward R. Turner, "Slavery in Pennsylvania" (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, Johns Hopkins Univ., 1910); Edwin Olson, "Negro Slavery in New York 1626-1827," (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, New York Univ., 1938); Lorenzo J. Greene, "The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776" (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, Columbia Univ., 1942) which counts also as colonial; Emma L. Thornborough, "Negro Slavery in the North: Its Legal and Constitutional Aspects" (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, Univ. of Michigan, 1946); and, Edgar J. McManus, "A History of Negro Slavery in New York" (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, Columbia Univ., 1959).

On the colonial period there are Russel J. Ferguson, "The Rights and Privileges of Bond-Servants and Slaves in the English Colonies of America" (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, Indiana Univ., 1928); Wiley J. Carnathan, "American Negro Slavery during the Revolutionary Era" (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, Univ. of Texas, 1949); Robert S. Cope, "Slavery and Servitude in the Colony of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century" (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, The Ohio State Univ., 1950); Lawrence Towner, "A Good Master Well Served: A Social History of Servitude in Massachusetts, 1620-1750: (Ph.d. dis., Dept. of History, Northwestern Univ., 1955). See Warren Kuehl, Dissertations in History (Lexington, 1965); and Dissertations Abstracts, 21-30 (Ann Arbor, 1961-1971).



The appearance in 1964 of Richard Wade's Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860 called some attention to the urban environment of slavery.<sup>1</sup> But it still left that attention in the Southern ante-bellum frame of reference largely defined by the work of Ulrich B. Phillips which for more than the last half-century has dominated the historiography of American Negro slavery.<sup>2</sup> The short shrift Phillips gave to slavery in the Northern colonies and the urban environment exemplifies the treatment that has neglected slavery in colonial New York City. Phillips dismissed "The Northern Colonies" and "Town Slaves" in his book American Negro Slavery not so much in length of discussion--although the first was the shortest chapter with thirteen pages, the second was average chapter length with twenty-three pages--but by the character of treatment.<sup>3</sup>

## 1

See T.P. Abernathy, "Review of Slavery in the Cities" in The American Historical Review, 70 (1965), 1240; Howard Zinn, "Review of Slavery in the Cities" in Book Week, 21 Feb., 1965, 5; Dwight L. Dummond, "Review of Slavery in the Cities" in The New York Times Book Review, 31 Jan. 1965, 3; Eugene D. Genovese, "Review of Slavery in the Cities" in Nation, 38 (1965), 200; and, unsigned, "Review of Slavery in the Cities" in The Yale Review, 8 (1964), 954.

## 2

Wood Gray, "Ulrich Bonnell Phillips", in The Marcus Jernegan Essays in American Historiography, edited by William G. Butchinson (Chicago, 1937); Richard Hofstadter, "U.B. Phillips and the Plantation Legend," Journal of Negro History, 29 (1944), esp. 110; and Eugene D. Genovese's "Forward" to Louisiana State University Press paperback edition of American Negro Slavery (Baton Rouge, 1966).

## 3

Phillips, American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime (New York, 1918), chs. 6 and 20.



"Slavery did not, and perhaps could not become an important industrial institution in any Northern community," Phillips wrote.<sup>1</sup> The "enticements" to own slaves, such as "soil...known to be fertile" of assurance of "gaining profits for investors" were, in his estimation, too few in the North.<sup>2</sup> Also, Phillips asserted, "the institution of unfree labor in ... indentured servants" provided the North with labor cheaper than the slaves who "were imported into every prosperous colony as a mere incident to its prosperity."<sup>3</sup> In short, according to Phillips, "the climate prevented profits, crude gang labor, and slaves were few" in the North.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, according to Phillips, slavery had no serious social impact in the North. "By reason of being distributed in detail," he asserted, Northern slaves "were more nearly assimilated to the civilization of the dominant race."<sup>5</sup> This, he contended, had the effect of making the problem of racial adjustment less acute than in areas where slaves were distributed in density--no place

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 113.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 98.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., 99, 98.

<sup>4</sup>  
Ibid., 98.

<sup>5</sup>  
Ibid., 114.



in the North being, according to him, such an area.<sup>1</sup> Overall then, Phillips concluded that the social and economic influences which made slavery important elsewhere were absent in the North.

Yet, some of the evidence Phillips used suggests he misjudged conditions in the North: Northern colonists demanded slaves to promote prosperity and to save money over the cost of wage labor and servants, and the slaves they got occasioned significant social problems. Laws throughout the Northern colonies reflected the difficulties in disciplining slaves and the perplexing situations they presented for human conduct and social relationships. Running away, stealing, dealing with white criminals, drinking, evading curfew, insulting and striking whites, and at times conniving to do deadly harm to them, slaves proved a problematic element for society in the North. "By many they [slaves] were somewhat unreasonably feared," to use the words of Phillips, and they were "regarded as strangers within the gates, by some welcomed because they were slaves, by others not welcomed even though they were in bondage."<sup>2</sup> Their presence, wrote Phillips himself, "prompted characteristic legislation, dating from about the beginning of the eighteenth century," which he later noted "remained in effect throughout the

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 114.



colonial period, [and] constituted a code of slave police which differed only in degree and fullness from those enacted by the more southerly colonial in the same generation."<sup>1</sup>

And, if on the social side slaves brought problems, many Northern colonists thought slaves also brought profits in business. Writing about the pro-slavery inclinations of Northern colonists, Phillips quoted parts of a letter written during the 1640s by Emanuel Downing to his brother-in-law and first governor of Massachusetts Bay, John Winthrop.

I do not see [wrote Downing] how wee can thrive untill wee get into a stock of slaves sufficient to doe all our business, for our children's children will hardly see this great continent filled with people, soe that our servants will still desire freedome to plant for themselves, and not stay but for verie great wages. And I suppose you know verie well how wee shall mayntayne 20 Moores cheaper than one Englishe servant.<sup>2</sup>

"On the whole it seems that the views expressed" in the letter, wrote Phillips, "...were not seriously out of harmony with the prevailing sentiment,"<sup>3</sup> but those views expressed a condition different from the one he said existed. First, Downing saw slaves as no "mere incident to...prosperity," as Phillips contended, but as necessary for the

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Ibid., 103, 105.

2

Ibid., 101; Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 36 (1828), 65.

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Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 100-101.



colonists to thrive and sufficiently conduct their business. Second, Downing foresaw it would take a long time to settle the plentiful land that drew servants into working for themselves or for others only at high wages. Third, on the relative cost of indentured servants and slaves, Downing made clear--even if by an exaggerated ratio--that he thought slaves much cheaper to maintain than white servants. Phillips failed, moreover, to substantiate the statement that the cost of slaves exceeded the value of their labor. Also, contrary to his suggestion that servants cost less than slaves, Phillips noted that 180 indentured servants sent to Massachusetts shortly after its settlement were released because they "could not earn their keep" while slaves were kept at work.<sup>1</sup>

Phillips attempted, however, to soften the import of the demand Downing expressed by suggesting that "An early realization that the price of negroes also was greater than the worth of their labor under ordinary circumstances in New England led the Yankee participants in the African trade to market their slave cargoes in the plantation colonies instead of bringing them home," even if some had wanted otherwise to lay in a stock of enslaved blacks.<sup>2</sup> Further, Phillips tried to belittle the number of slaves that were stocked: quoting

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 102.



from John Josslyn's "Two Voyages to New England," he suggested that by experience the people learned that "many hands make light work, many hands make a full fraught, but many mouths eat up all."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, according to Governor Joseph Dudley's reckoning in 1708, Boston had 400 slaves and as Phillips himself wrote, "in the following decades their number steadily mounted" until the eve of the American Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, by focusing on Massachusetts for more than half his discussion of the Northern colonies, Phillips mistakenly implied that it typified the regimes in the region. Yet, Rhode Island, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, for instance, had more slaves by proportion and in volume than Massachusetts, and in 1774 Newport's 1,246 slaves almost doubled the number in Boston.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Phillips conceded that slaves in New York "constituted a regime never paralleled in equal volume elsewhere" in the North and did not fit into the low Northern profile he projected.<sup>4</sup> Phillips

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.; Josslyn, "Two Voyages to New England", The Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 23 (1815), 332.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 103.

<sup>3</sup> Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, American Population before the Federal Census of 1790 (New York, 1932), 12-46, 61-69, 105-112, 113-119; W.D. Johnston, "Slavery in Rhode Island, 1755-1776," Rhode Island Historical Society Publications, New Series, 2 (1894), 126-127; Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 106.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 110.



wrote, moreover, that slaves in New York "became fairly numerous in all districts except the extreme frontier, but in the counties fronting New York Harbor their ratio was somewhat above average."<sup>1</sup> New York City at the opening of the eighteenth century had more slaves, in fact, than all of Massachusetts, but Phillips said nothing about the City, and except for mentioning the number of slaves at Boston in 1708 and at several Rhode Island towns in 1774, he made no reference to urban slaves in the Northern colonies--in part reflecting his unfavorable view of "Town Slaves."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 109.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 106.



3.

As Phillips had shown little regard for slavery in the Northern colonies and belittled the regimes there for not having much relation to, or bearing on, the importance or business interest of American Negro slavery, so also he treated "Town Slaves," focusing on them exclusively in the antebellum South and, then, largely with evidence drawn from Charleston, South Carolina, the preeminent urban slave regime in America.<sup>1</sup>

"Town Slavery," in the view of Phillips, "had a strong tone of domesticity, and the masters were often paternalistically inclined."<sup>2</sup> The first, according to him, stamped the regime with a preponderance of women attached to household service with their husbands and sons engaged "in the semi-domestic employment of coachmen and porters, and among the draymen and coopers and the unskilled laborers in addition."<sup>3</sup> The second stamped slavery less forcefully because, he wrote, "The town regime was not so conducive to lifelong adjustment of masters and slaves" as was the case in the countryside.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., ch. 20, 402-424.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 404.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., 402.

<sup>4</sup>  
Ibid., 405.

"The patriarchal relations of the country, which," in the words of Phillips, "depended much upon the isolation of the groups, could hardly prevail in similar degree where the slaves of many masters intermingled."<sup>1</sup> For he contended that in the urban setting, owners "had little choice but to hire out or sell any slave who proved a superfluity or a misfit in his domestic establishment."<sup>2</sup> Sale, of course, legally alienated an owner from a slave, but its consequences were not as important to Phillips as the results of hiring out which, he thought, attenuated the owner-slave relationship by "granting to each [slave hired out] a large degree of industrial freedom." Moreover, he declared,

The practice also injured the interests of white competitors in the same trades, who sometimes bitterly complained; it occasionally put pressure upon the slaves to fill out their wages by theft; and it gave rise to some degree to a public apprehension that the liberty of movement might be perverted to purposes of conspiracy.<sup>3</sup>

The end effect, according to Phillips, was that "As to routine control, urban proprietors were less complete masters even of slaves in their own employ than were those in the country."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 404.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 405.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., 411.

<sup>4</sup>  
Ibid., 414.



In short, Phillips estimated that "Town Slaves" were questionable property, perhaps producing some comforts within owners' households but little economic benefit, while they produced large problems of competition and control within the community.

In Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860, Richard C. Wade revised and amplified the treatment Phillips gave "Town Slaves" by broadening investigation into the urban setting of slavery with study of the examples of Charleston, South Carolina; New Orleans, Louisiana; Richmond, Virginia; Savannah, Georgia; Mobile, Alabama, Louisville, Kentucky; Washington, D.C.; Norfolk, Virginia; and St. Louis, Missouri.

Wade substantiated some of what Phillips left in doubt. For example, to support his statement about the domestic character and sex ratio of town slaves, Phillips tabulated statistics of occupations summarized from J.L. Dawson and H.W. DeSaussure's Census of Charleston for 1848. The table listed 7,433 slaves--52.6 percent females and 47.4 percent males--and showed 5,272, or 70.9 percent, of the slaves to be domestic servants.<sup>1</sup> But Charleston had about 18,500 slaves in 1848, so those Phillips listed were only 40 percent of the total.<sup>2</sup> Wade gave the full slave population for 1850 which

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<sup>1</sup> (Charleston, 1848), 31-36; Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 402-403.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Negro Population 1790-1915 (Washington, D.C., 1918), 57.

was 19,532 blacks--55.8 percent females and 44.2 percent males. Moreover, Wade gave the full population totals from the federal censuses of 1820 through 1860 for the eight southern cities on which he focused.<sup>1</sup> The figures gave substance to the statement that "Urban slavery increasingly contained an imbalance between male and female Negroes."<sup>2</sup>

At another point Wade fleshed out the bones of the argument Phillips used for the disruptive effects of hiring out. Wade agreed that hiring out "was an attempt to adjust slavery to the economic demands of urban life" which "allowed towns to maintain a Negro labor base," and he found the practice fraught with the same problems Phillips had--insufficiency, competition and poor control.<sup>3</sup> The "complex system never proved satisfactory," he wrote, for the loosened "restraints on the hirelings aroused apprehensions that the 'peculiar institution' itself was in jeopardy, and the proportionate shrinkage in the colored population in the pre-war decade created shortages which had to be made up by white workers, especially by immigrants."<sup>4</sup>

Wade in communities with the urban Negroes had to learn to live

<sup>1</sup> Wade, Slavery in the Cities, 325-330.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 79.

Ibid., 37.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 343.

Ibid., 54.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 200.

Ibid.



In addition, as Phillips had highlighted the weakened mastery of urban slaveowners, from myriad examples Wade concluded that "each year some blacks slipped out of the owner's yard into a new dimension of independence, if not freedom."<sup>1</sup> Making explicit what Phillips had implied, Wade wrote that

Once outside the enclosure and beyond the master's eye, the slave entered a quite different world. The closely controlled environment of the compound suddenly gave way to the variety, diversity, and fluidity of the city. In place of the familiarity and intimacy of the owner's place, he found the novelty and anonymity of town living.<sup>2</sup>

He suggested also, as Phillips had not, how the lack of slave isolation worked to undermine the urban regime.

Being surrounded "every day [by] the possibilities of what they considered a better life," wrote Wade, "resulted in constant unrest among a significant number of urban slaves, an unrest that manifested itself not only in persistent pressure to widen the latitude within slavery but also in sporadic attempts to get outside it by escape or mutiny."<sup>3</sup> The effect to him was as Phillips had contended: whites in communities with the urban regime had to learn to live

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 79.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 143.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., 209.

with anxiety, and the same police and whipping posts which reminded blacks of servitude, reminded whites of their own insecurity.<sup>1</sup>

In sum, Wade agreed with Phillips that "wherever it [slavery] touched urban conditions it was in deep trouble."<sup>2</sup> Although the two expressed this and other conclusions about the urban setting in general, their evidence did not extend outside the antebellum South. What about evidence from slavery in cities elsewhere: does the substance of what Phillips and Wade wrote hold, for instance, in the preeminent urban setting of slavery in the colonial North--New York City?

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 242.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 3.



Phillips and Wade, by their own admission, focus on the institution at the stage of disintegration in the urban setting. Slavery in colonial New York City offers evidence of an urban regime at a different stage of development. It also offers a view of the ever-widening distance between the city and the countryside setting emphasized by Edwin Olson's "Negro Slavery in New York, 1626-1827" and by Edgar J. McManus's The History of Negro Slavery in New York.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in New York slavery was wedded to agriculture and the upkeep of large estates and sparse populations. Population density, however, compounded the problem of slavery in the City, where the institution was more troublesome, more commercial, and more diversified.

The City found itself a strange half-way house where Blacks intermingled with everything and with everyone and where, at the same time, the sense persisted that Blacks were isolated. Necessity integrated Blacks in the economic area, for slavery was a system of labor substitution. Even as New Yorkers imported Blacks into the City to work--to slave--however, they also had to make arrangements

The separation of Blacks and whites under slavery was more  
1 logical than physical. It was a fiction of the law. Blacks  
Olson's work was a doctoral dissertation submitted in 1938 at New York University. McManus's study was a doctoral dissertation submitted in 1959 at Columbia University and was published in 1966 by Syracuse University Press.

for Blacks outside the area of economics. The most problematic area for those arrangements was social control, and law and custom continuously directed efforts toward some satisfactory solution in that area since slaves were perennially troublesome and habitually harrassed and discomfoted whites.

Indeed, more slaves were executed in colonial New York City than in any other place in America. But New Yorkers persisted in maintaining slavery even at the cost of public disturbance. For on the economic side, slaves satisfied an overriding but unfulfilled demand for laborers. As long as the shortage of white laborers existed, slavery existed.

When New Yorkers decided they no longer needed slavery the direct corollary was that they no longer needed Blacks. But they were not able to rid themselves physically of the troublesome presence. Increased numbers of white laborers could satisfy the conditions for a wholly white labor force, but increased numbers alone could not solve the problem of achieving a wholly white society. However many whites there were, the problem remained of what to do with Blacks outside slavery.

The separation of Blacks and whites under slavery was more psychological than physical. It was a fiction of the law. Blacks worked with whites, lived with whites and ate and slept in the same places as whites. Yet, the law marked Blacks off as a separate group. They were slaves. Emancipation reversed the old legal



fiction. Slavery had isolated Blacks psychologically. A new system, segregation, isolated Blacks physically.

This solution was not peculiar to New York City. If Arthur Zilversmit refers to the abolition of slavery in the North during the years immediately following the American Revolution as the "first emancipation," one might take the groundwork laid by Leon Litwack's North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free State, 1790-1860 and refer to the aftermath of slavery in the North during these years as the "first segregation."<sup>1</sup>

The whole story of what happened to Blacks in New York City from the beginning of slavery until segregation is a fertile subject area for continued research. This study concerns itself with an essential part of that area by looking at the development of slavery in colonial New York City.

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Zilversmit, The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North (Chicago, 1967); Litwack (Chicago, 1961).

## II

## THE FIRST SLAVES: A DUTCH TREAT

Blacks first landed on Manhattan as property of the Dutch West India Company the year Peter Minuit purchased the island from the Indians. That initial cargo of eleven males made blacks about a tenth of the population--excluding Indians.<sup>1</sup> Three black women arrived in 1628, joined shortly by an unspecified number of Africans described as "Angola slaves, thievish, lazy, useless trash."<sup>2</sup> The

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Berhold Fernow (ed.), Records of New Amsterdam, 1653-1674 (7 vols.; New York, 1897), I, 27; Arthur Peterson and George Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality (1917; reissue, Port Washington, N.Y., 1967), 4. Arrival of the first enslaved blacks often was placed during 1625 and 1626 on the basis of Director-General William Kief's notation in 1644 that the slaves had then served the Company "18 to 19 years;" see E.B. O'Callaghan (ed.), Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 1638-1674 (Albany, 1868), 36. Also see E.B. O'Callaghan (ed.), Voyages of the Slavers "St. John" and "Arms of Amsterdam" (Albany, 1867), 13, 202.

## 2

Edwin Vernon Morgan, "Slavery in New York with Special Reference to New York City," in Half Moon Series: Papers on Historic New York, edited by Maud Wilder Goodwin, et al., 2nd ser., 2 (1898), 3.



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Dutch brought more blacks to New Amsterdam at irregular intervals to bolster the colony. For example, between 1655 and 1664 the Company brought six hundred blacks to New Amsterdam. So, in 1664 when the English captured the Dutch colony and renamed it New York, slaves already were there.



The Dutch provided New York City with more than the persons of the first slaves however, for their experience presaged much of the later development of slavery under English control. The English had different ideas about the shape of settlement, but circumstances forced both to alter their plans for the population and profit of the settlement. Both had to cope with the slow growth of white population. In order to bolster settlement, each decided to substitute slaves for free laborers and white servants. Yet neither preferred slaves as a principal element in the population. Further, while each found slaves useful, they also found slaves troublesome. Time relieved the Dutch from the trouble the English had. The size of the population also reduced the seriousness of some of the Dutch problems with slaves. Yet the Dutch introduced slaves to the area; their surrender made it unnecessary for the English to inaugurate a regime; and, their experience provides an introduction to what the English encountered.<sup>1</sup>

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E.B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow (eds.), Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York (15 vols.; Albany, 1856-1887), I, 57, II, 372-373: referred to hereafter as N.Y. Col. Docs. J. Franklin Jameson (ed.), Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664 (reprint 1909; New York, 1959), 49, 415. O'Callaghan (ed.), Calendar of Historical Manuscripts in the Office of the Secretary of State (2 vols.; Albany, 1866), I, 268, 308. For articles of surrender consented to at Stuyvesant's "Bouwery" by the English Royal Commissioners and representatives of New Netherland, see New York State Library, History Bulletin, No. 2 (Albany, 1898), 95-98; N.Y. Col. Docs., II, 250-253. The English approach to New Amsterdam also put calendar dates ajar. The Dutch, of course, used the New Style calendar, but the English did not. Thus, with English takeover the Old Style calendar dates were introduced. For a period double

Slaves had not figured in the first Dutch thoughts of colonizing the Hudson area. The Dutch initially planned a commercial colony profiting primarily from fur-trading.<sup>1</sup> The project grew out of explorations by Adriaen Block and Hendrick Christianson in 1613 when they set up a fur-trading post on Manhattan Island, and it was carried further the following year when Block and others received a three-year monopoly on fur-trading in the area and formed the United New Netherland Company. That company was absorbed in 1621 by the newly formed Dutch West India Company which received a monopoly on all Dutch trade in the Atlantic and began

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dating was used. Officially, however, until 1752 dating was according to the Old Style calendar--except for the brief Dutch recapture in 1673--which meant a subtraction of 10 days during the seventeenth century, and 25 March starting the new year. "New Style begins to take place in all the English Dominions, when that Day, which would be the 3d, must be reckoned the 14th of September, and from then forward, our reckonings of Time will be agreeable to that of most modern Nations." New York Post-Boy, 31 August 1752. Throughout this study years given are New Style, although date in the month is not necessarily converted.

<sup>1</sup>  
N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 66-67; John R. Brodhead, History of the State of New York (2 vols.; New York, 1853-1871), I, 137; Thomas J. Condon, New York Beginnings: The Commercial Origins of New Netherland (New York, 1968), esp. 7-13; Van Cleaf Bachman, Peltries or Plantations: The Economic Policies of the Dutch West India Company in New Netherland, 1623-1639 (Baltimore, 1969), passim, esp. 3-5; J. Franklin Jameson, "William Usselinx, Founder of the Dutch and Swedish West India Companies" American Historical Association, Papers, 2 (1887), 166-177.



to develop a trading network. Also, it expectantly renamed the old post on Manhattan after the commercial center of the Dutch homeland--New Amsterdam.<sup>1</sup>

The West India Company scheme for the settlement was more broad than the original fur-trading plan. In part necessity dictated that, for profits from fur-trading early proved restricted. Vagaries of Nature too much interfered with gathering furs to make it a steady and solid basis for settlement. Moreover, even the greatest number of pelts and skins farmable in the area could not long, if ever, pay Company expenses. Hence, to profit from settlement the Company had to do more than fur-trade.<sup>2</sup>

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Herman T. Colenbrander, Kolontiale Geschiedenis (3 vols.; The Hague, 1925-1926), II, 136-171; Victor H. Paltsits, "The Founding of New Amsterdam in 1626," American Antiquarian Society Proceedings, 34 (1924), 39-65.

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See rejection of notion of permanent settlement in favor of dominance of trade motives in Jameson, "William Usselinx," 166-177; Bachman, Peltries or Plantation, 17, 124-129; and Condon, New York Beginnings, 37. Also see Meade C. Williams "The Early Fur Trade in North America", Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Collections, 35 (1907), 58-73; Paul Phillips, The Fur Trade (Norman, 1961), esp. ch. 1; Gary B. Nash, "The Quest for the Susquehanna Valley: New York, Pennsylvania, and the Seventeenth Century Fur Trade," New York History, 48 (1967), 3-27.

Grain-producing impressed the Company Directors as a profitable prospect in 1629 when New Amsterdam sent them samples grown by settlers.<sup>1</sup> To grow grain on a scale profitable to the Company, however, demanded more populous settlement of the area. In an effort to encourage growth the Company issued a "Charter of Privileges and Exemptions to Patroons" providing a sixteen square mile estate to anyone (called a Patroon) who settled fifty persons there for four years.<sup>2</sup> Patroons received almost feudal rights to their land-grants, which were perpetual and gave each Patroon full civil and criminal jurisdiction within the lands--a condition which, with modifications in 1640 and 1664, endured throughout the colonial period. Settlers were restricted to the Patroonship and to farming, and they were liable to Patroons for rents payable in services, monies or goods.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Schager to States-General, N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 37-38; also, Instruction to Director-General, ibid., I, 161, and IVI, 166.

<sup>2</sup> O'Callaghan, History of New Netherland (2 vols.; New York, 1846-1848), I, 110, 158-159. See Patroons of New Netherland to States-General, N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 85-87.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; Warren G. Sherwood, "The Patroons of New Netherland," New York State Historical Association Quarterly Journal, 12 (1931), 271-294. Bachman, Peltries or Plantations, 74-76; Condon, New York Beginnings, ch. 2. For trouble later created by the continuation of patroon privileges, see Irving Mark, Agrarian Conflicts in Colonial New York, 1711-1775 (New York, 1940). On later "New Freedoms and Exemptions," see N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 97-98; also see resolution of States-General urging colonization, ibid., I, 106; also see information on settlement and land in ibid., I, 331. The Company



To supplement the influx of persons expected under the Patroon System, the Company provided for recruitment of indentured servants and for importation of blacks. The importation of blacks was not to last "Longer than it [the Company] should think proper," however, and during the next two decades it introduced few blacks.<sup>1</sup> It preferred white servants, but they were neither being shipped in satisfactory number nor remaining in satisfactory condition for the settlement. The number of indentured servants also remained small. But the small number of servants proceeded from a cause different from that for the small number of slaves. Officials were not pleased by the prospect of a colony populated too heavily by blacks.

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attempted to attract small farmers, offering them a bouwerie, which would be cleared, passage to the colony, and tools and livestock. The offer never was made good. See Edwin Olson, "Negro Slavery in New York, 1626-1827" (Ph.d. dissertation, New York University, 1938), 8. Also see Charles W. Spencer, "The Land System of Colonial New York," *New York State Historical Association, Proceedings*, 16 (1917), 150-164, and Arthur E. Sutherland, "The Tenantry on the New York Manor," *Cornell Law Quarterly*, 41 (1956), 620-639.

<sup>1</sup>  
O'Callaghan, *History of New Netherland*, I, 110.

As officials of the Company lamented in 1646, there was great difficulty in getting "farm servants to migrate," and those who did migrate, added the officials, "must be bribed to go thither by a great deal of money and promises."<sup>1</sup> Further, after, a term of service or, in some cases, before then, indentured servants disappointed the Company by pursuing trade rather than farming.<sup>2</sup> The disappointment diminished the Company's recruitment of servants and their numbers remained small, as did the number of slaves. So, all in all, during the first score years supplements did not add much to the settlement by way of numbers, nor did the Patroon System itself.<sup>3</sup>

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Report of the Board of Audit to the Assembly of 19, N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 154-155. Also see "Instructions to Director-General and Council," ibid., I, 163; and, Advice of Board of Audit, ibid., I, 245-246.

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For examples see N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 145-155; and Jameson, Narratives of New Netherland, 89. Also, see David T. Valentine, "Slaves and the Slave Trade in New Netherland," in Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York (New York, 1863), 582.

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See "New Freedoms and Exemptions," particularly Article 30, N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 97-98. Also see Resolution of the States-General urging the colonization of New Netherland, ibid., I, 106; "Articles for the Colonization and Trade of New Netherland," ibid., I, 112; "Proposed Freedoms and Exemptions," ibid., I, 123; Also, see "Memorial of Eight Men at the Mannhattans to the States-General," ibid., I, 139-40, and "Reply," ibid., I, 141.



Still, the Company held hope--a hope it decided to rest more largely on slaves--and in 1647 the Board of Audit "considered [the colony] to be the most fruitful" Company settlement and predicted large future profits if production and commerce increased.<sup>1</sup> "With a view, then, to give greater encouragement to agriculture, and consequently to population," the Board suggested, "we should consider it highly advantageous that a way be opened to allow them [the colonists] to export their produce even to Brazil, in their vessels, under certain duties," and "to carry slaves back in return."<sup>2</sup> "By this means," the Board continued, "not only would Brazil be supplied with provisions at a cheaper rate, but New Netherland would buy slave labor, be more extensively cultivated than it has hitherto been."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 246; also see "Report on Affairs of Company," *ibid.*, I, 227, 231.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution of States-General, 10 February 1648, quoted in Morgan, "Slavery in New York," 5. See also, Report of Board of Audit to Assembly of 19, N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 154-155; and, Instructions to Director-General and Council of New Netherland, *ibid.*, I, 163. Also see *ibid.*, I, 245-246; a report on the affairs of the West India Company, *ibid.*, I, 227, 231, and O'Callaghan, Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 101-102, 107.

<sup>3</sup> N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 246.

Half-a-year after the Board's report, a resolution of the States-General allowed New Netherlanders "to export their fish, flour and produce...to Brazil, in private or the Company's ships... and in return to export, at a certain duty from Brazil, to New Netherland and not elsewhere, as much merchandise, such as Slaves."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the Company took a position "emphasizing the superiority of slave labor."<sup>2</sup>

The Dutch had come, then, to hope that slaves would solve some of the problems of settlement by providing labor and by being a product of trade. Free labor and temporarily unfree labor had proven too difficult to attract and control.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, no problems existed in "attracting" slaves and, as they had been small

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Ibid., II, 22, 430.

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Report of the Affairs of the West India Company, ibid., I, 227, 231; Director in Holland to Stuyvesant, ibid., XVI, 77.

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Bertus H. Wabeke, Dutch Emigration to North America, 1624-1860 (New York, 1944); Arthur Newton, The European Nations in the West Indies (London, 1933), 143-155; Bachman, Peltries or Plantations, ch. 3; N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 66-67, 85-87; O'Callaghan, History of New Netherland, I, 110.



in number, control over them seemed less a problem than with any other labor.<sup>1</sup> To encourage settlers to get "negroes to be employed in farming," the Company sold blacks to colonists at a discount averaging ten percent and conveniently provided free exchange of "unsatisfactory" Negroes.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in twenty years the West India Company moved from taking a dim view of large numbers of slaves within the settlement's population to a view of encouraging widespread use of slaves as a necessity to develop settlement.<sup>3</sup>

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N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 245-246; O'Callaghan, History of New Netherland, I, 110; Philip D. Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census (Madison, Wis., 1969); W.E.B. DuBois, The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America (New York, 1896).

2

Report of the Affairs of the West India Company, N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 227, 231; Director in Holland to Stuyvesant, *ibid.*, XVI, 77; A.J.F. Van Laer (ed.), Correspondence of Jeremias Van Rensselaer (Albany, 1932), 255; Federal Writer's Project, Maritime History of New York (Philadelphia, 1937), 27; In addition, although never put into action, the Company thought seriously of allotting each Patroon a dozen blacks from "prizes in which negroes shall be found," N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 98.

3

N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 162, 245-246; "Advice of Chamber Accounts," *ibid.*, 246; O'Callaghan, Voyages of the Slaver, 202; O'Callaghan, History of New Netherlands, 158-159; Patroons of New Netherland to the States-General, N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 85-86; *ibid.*, XIV, 35, 166; I, 161; William Dunlap, History of New Netherlands, Province of New York and the State of New York to the Adoption of the Federal Constitution (New York, 1839), I, 56; Lucy Green, The De Forests and the Walloon Founding of New Netherland (Lincoln, Neb., 1916), 62.

The shift in the Company's position on slaves resulted not only from thoughts about the needs of the settlement but from reassessment of the Dutch Atlantic trading system. By 1648 the Dutch West India Company had come to promote shipment of blacks to New Amsterdam because selling blacks and encouraging their employment was a profit-making proposition for the Company. Indeed, using opportunities opened by the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), the Company sold slaves widely on the western side of the Atlantic. But at the conclusion of the war the Company found increased competition in selling blacks, particularly to its best customers--the English and Spanish colonies. As a consequence of the new competition the Company's sales decreased, and it looked for new markets for its black cargoes. New Amsterdam looked like such a market.<sup>1</sup>

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For background into which to fit the action here, see the still valuable survey by Cicely V. Wedgwood, The Thirty Years War (London, 1938); on the treaty see Max Brauback, Der Westfälische Friede (Berlin, 1942). Also see Wabeke, Dutch Emigration to North America, 1626-1860; Newton, European Nations in the West Indies, 151ff. See Lawrence A. Harper, The English Navigation Laws: A Seventeenth Century Experiment in Social Engineering (New York, 1939), ch. 1; Alec Waugh, The Sugar Islands (New York, 1949), ch. 2; Newton, European Nations in the West Indies, esp. 156, 196; also, J.H. Parry and P.M. Sherlock, A Short History of the West Indies (London, 1956), ch. 3; Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies (3 vols.; London, 1801), I, 278ff.



New Amsterdam further figured prominently in the Company's plan to take slaves as pirated prizes.<sup>1</sup> Sitting a degree north of the 40th parallel which runs almost through the middle of Spain, New Amsterdam enjoyed an advantageous position for raiding middle North Atlantic trade routes. Shipping between Spain and the West Indies and, to a lesser degree, from Africa to the West Indies, lay especially open to attack in a grid bounded by the 25th and 35th parallels and the 20th and 60th meridians. Dutch privateers much profited from plundering within the grid. After capturing the cargo at sea, the privateers unloaded the prize "cargoes" along the North Atlantic coast. Thus, for instance, it was not accidental that in 1619 John Rolfe's report of the first blacks sold in the English colonies of North America read, "about the last of August came in a Dutch Man-of-War that sold us twenty negars."<sup>2</sup>

Such prize cargoes brought New Amsterdam about a quarter to a third of the blacks enslaved in New Netherland before 1655.<sup>3</sup>

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See N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 98; Bachman, Peltries or Plantations; Condon, New York Beginnings.

2

Elizabeth Donnan (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America (4 vols.; Washington, D.C., 1930-1935), I, 316.

3

On role of privateers, see Condon, New York Beginnings, 76-79; on slaves, see David Valentine, "Slaves and Slave Trading in New Netherland," Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York (New York, 1863), 582-595. On general context of privateering at

The La Garce and the De Raaf provide examples of the privateers' dealings with the port. The La Garce brought New Amsterdam a prize cargo in 1642 that proved problematic, not only at the time but for years to come. The problem was that the Spanish blacks it unloaded claimed to be free. Nevertheless, they were sold as slaves since they had no proof of free status.<sup>1</sup> Almost exactly a century later, another group of Spanish Negroes taken as a prize from the captured sloop La Soledad likewise declared their free status and protested against their treatment as slaves; but they fared no better than their predecessors had a century before. Their declaration and protest fell on deaf ears.<sup>2</sup>

The De Raaf's cargo of 1652 showed a slightly different side of the problem with Spanish prizes. When it docked that spring, the De Raaf sold forty-four captured Spanish blacks in New Amsterdam. According to the treaty of Westphalia (1648), however, such an action

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the time, see Howard Chapin, Privateer Ships and Sailors: The First Century of American Colonial Privateering, 1625-1725 (Toulon, Fr., 1926), and George F. Dow and John H. Edmonds, The Pirates of the New England Coast, 1630-1730 (Salem, Mass., 1923); also see the illustrative documents in J.F. Jameson (ed.), Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period (New York, 1923).

<sup>1</sup>  
Valentine, Manual (1870), 764.

<sup>2</sup>  
See Charles M. Hough (ed.), Report of Cases in the Vice Admiralty of the Province of New York and in the Court of Admiralty of the State of New York, 1715-1788 (New Haven, 1925), 17, case of "Capt. John Lush ag't Sloop La Soledad."



was illegal and the owner of the Spanish ship armed with the right of international law came to New Amsterdam to claim his property, including the blacks. His was a wasted trip, for he got nothing for his troubles.<sup>1</sup>

The cargoes of the La Garce and the De Raaf underscore problems that troubled the port as late as the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1742) and King George's War (1743-1748). First, depriving blacks of freedom on the basis of color only proved a problem. Second, not recognizing the rights of other nationals through proper legal treatment also proved a problem. The Dutch had only a few trials with the two problems, and it remained for the English to enunciate a principle for the consistent handling of each, for they received cargoes that brought both those problems and more.<sup>2</sup>

Besides cargoes brought to port by privateers, private merchants with special permits also supplied blacks to New Amsterdam.

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See N.Y. Col. Docs., II, 24, 31.

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In relation to Spanish Negroes, the second issue was much discussed in the City newspapers later. For examples, see New York Weekly Post-Boy, 23 Jan. 1748/1749; 3, 24 April 1749. Also see Daniel Parish, "Transcripts of Material on Slavery in the Public Records Office in London," New York Historical Society Manuscript Collection, bundled by date: see Parish, "transcripts" (1729-1760), 3, 8-9, 14-15. For a case in 1688 when City authorities intervened on behalf of some Spanish blacks about to be sold as prizes, see A.J. Van Laer (ed.), "Calendar of Council Minutes, 1688-1783," New York State Library, Bulletin, No. 58 (1902), 61; and N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 342.

The West India Company expected the merchants to provide more regularized service than the nature of privateering allowed. More sensitive to supply and demand and more available for contact, the special permit merchants were expected by the Company to encourage sales and to supply demand as it arose.<sup>1</sup>

The Company's object was to assure that anyone who so wished could purchase a slave in the New Amsterdam market. Yet, the Company wanted to coordinate the numbers of slaves for sale as closely as it could with the numbers of slaves buyers demanded. Had the Company itself been providing the slaves for sale, it could have regulated supply as it saw fit. But with lucrative other opportunities attracting its energies during the 1630s and 1640s, the Company was little interested in being the supplier and by special permit allowed private merchants to deal in slaves.

The Company feared, however, that the private merchants might become too freewheeling with black cargoes. Thus, it specified that the special permit merchants were only allowed to serve customers by contract. The Company suspected that would constrain the merchants both in Africa and in America. First, merchants could only transport from Africa as many slaves as they had contracts for. Second, merchants had to sell slaves only to

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Advice of Chamber of Accounts, N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 246; Report of Board of Audit, ibid., I, 154-155; Instruction to the Director-General and Council of New Netherland, ibid., I, 163; Valentine, Manual (1863), 582; Report of Affairs of the West India Company, ibid., I, 227, 231; Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 20.



customers specified by contract. The two together prevented merchants from selling slaves where the Company did not want them and, also, it prevented the merchants from deflating slave prices in the short run by presenting large numbers for sale. In short, the Company's idea was that the contract would restrain merchants, and it did only too well.

The Company too much strained the special permit merchants; for, saddled with restrictions, they supplied relatively few slaves to the New Amsterdam market. Rather than coordinating supply and demand, contract service created problems for buyer and seller. For one thing, it required customers to agree to buy slaves sight unseen and at a price which might fluctuate unfavorably. The merchant had similar problems with a fluctuating price, for the market trends might make it unfavorable for him to sell. For instance, customers and merchants might contract a year in advance for a cargo and find that at delivery the price obtainable was significantly different from the contract price. If the market price went up during the intervening year, the customer saved money, and if it went down, the merchant saved.

The prices mostly were going up, however, and merchants found themselves in a bind. If they projected price increases they would attract few customers because of an apparent inflation. Yet, if merchants contracted at the prevailing price, by the next year it would have gone up and brought them a loss. Thus, the restrictions imposed by contract heightened customer and merchants' risk and

stifled demands so much that during a little more than two decades contract merchants supplied fewer than one hundred blacks to the colony.<sup>1</sup>

In 1649 following the close of the Thirty Years' War and its reassessment of slave-trading to New Amsterdam, the West India Company took over the special permits, but it fared no better with the contract trade than the merchants. Service by contract imposed the same restraints on the Company that it had on the private merchants and, further, customers seemed even less inclined to contract with the Company. Indeed, after the Company took over the trade, contract service virtually died. For instance, although the Company announced its service in 1648, the fiscal officer at New Amsterdam reported that between then and 1652 "No request for Negroes has been presented from Patroons or Colonists here to my knowledge."<sup>2</sup>

Even while eschewing contract service, New Amsterdam did receive slaves. Privateers and occasional regular slavers undercut contract service while proving there was demand for slaves in the city's market. For example, a slaver sold its cargo so quickly in

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Director to Stuyvesant, N.Y. Col. Docs., XVI, 77; Petrus J. Blok, History of the People of the Netherlands (6 vols.; New York, 1899-1912), IV, 80-81.

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N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 227, 231, 500.



1647 that it left promises--almost like contract service--with settlers for a shipment the next year.<sup>1</sup> The Wittespaert, another regular slaver, also had its entire cargo purchased immediately.<sup>2</sup> Taking a cue from such sales, the Company sailed regular slavers to New Amsterdam after 1655 and, in the nine years before the English takeover, auctioned six hundred blacks.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the Company had turned its attention in full to developing a slave market at New Amsterdam. Until 1648 it had been too busy elsewhere in the Atlantic to pay much attention to selling slaves in its northernmost outpost, for opportunities in the Spanish and English colonies had distracted it. When the English and Spanish crowns closed down the illegal, but lucrative, Dutch trade, the Company turned to developing sales where it could. Neglect, however, had dampened demand in and around New Amsterdam, as the Company discovered when it took over the contract service.

By its own efforts the Company had restricted slave-trading with New Amsterdam and, then, tried rapidly to reverse its position and stimulate growth of a slave population. For instance, in 1653, when offered the opportunity to sell its blacks in New Amsterdam

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1  
Director in Holland to Stuyvesant, ibid., XVI, 77.

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Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 191.

3  
N.Y. Col. Docs., II, 504; George Howell (ed.), "Colonial Records, General Entries, I, 1664-1665," New York State Library, History Bulletin, No. 2 (1899), 54.

at a profit to a group of Jews in Dutch-occupied Curacao, the Company refused to sell.<sup>1</sup> By 1661, the Directors resolved "not only that slaves shall be kept in New Netherland, as...hitherto ordered, but that they shall moreover be exported to the English and other neighbors."<sup>2</sup>

But the Company had missed its chance. When the English and other neighbors around New Amsterdam had repeatedly petitioned for supplies of slaves and when patroonships such as Rensselaerwyck had requested "any suitable blacks available," the Company had been slow to act and had saddled the New Amsterdam market with restrictive contract service and irregular slavers.<sup>3</sup> The Company

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See Max Kohler, "Jews and the American Anti-Slavery Movement," Jewish-American Historical Society Publications, No. 5 (1897), 41.

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Quoted in Morgan, "Slavery in New York," 7. Also, see Magistrates at Gravesend, Long Island, to the Directors at New Amsterdam, N.Y. Col. Docs., II, 156; Southampton Town Records (4 vols.; Sag Harbor, 1874-1878), II, 207; Ralph R. Ireland, "Slavery on Long Island: A Study in Economic Motivation," Journal of Long Island History, 6 (1966), 1-12.

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A.J.F. Van Laer (ed.), "The Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts," New York State Library, History Bulletin, No. 4 (1908), 642.



listened too late to Director General Peter Stuyvesant's recommendation that blacks be imported "to promote and advance the population and agriculture."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps symbolically, the only large black cargo (about three hundred) the Company brought to New Amsterdam arrived aboard the Gideon in August, 1664, only days before the Dutch surrendered to the English.<sup>2</sup> Stuyvesant, himself, characterized the arrival as most unfortunate and reported that in addition to presenting security problems, the "half-starved" blacks pressed hard on an already short food supply, thus speeding Dutch surrender.<sup>3</sup>

and estimated the loss of property to be more than doubled that.

For further information on the "black" population, see also Virginia, and other sources, several problems in connection with the arrival of the blacks in the seventeenth century, from Organization to Society, Virginia in the seventeenth century, Journal of the Historical Society of Virginia, 1970, 1971.

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O'Callaghan, Voyages of the Slaver, 202.

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Valentine, Manual (1863), 594.

3

Ibid., N.Y. Col. Docs., II, 504; Colonial Records, General Entries, I, 54.

The West India Company's neglect of New Amsterdam and all New Netherland for more than a quarter century could not be corrected in a decade-and-a-half. The Company lost the colony. Settlement had been a shade too slow. Yet, between the establishment of New Amsterdam in 1625 and its surrender in 1664, New Netherland's growth was not completely uncomparable, for instance, with Virginia's early growth.<sup>1</sup> For example, in the first forty-one years of settlement (1607-1648), Virginia acquired three hundred blacks.<sup>2</sup> New Netherland in its thirty-nine years more than doubled that.<sup>3</sup>

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New Netherland was a "company settlement," as was Virginia, and they shared several problems in common--problems detailed on the Virginia side by Sigmund Diamond, "From Organization to Society: Virginia in the Seventeenth Century," American Journal of Sociology, 63 (1958), 457-475.

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"Percy's Observations," in Samuel Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes: Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells (20 Vols.; London, 1625; reprint, New York, 1965), IV, 1689; and, Greene and Harrington, American Population, 134, 136.

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O'Callaghan, Voyages of the Slavers, 202; Greene and Harrington, American Population, 88; Van Laer (ed.), "Early Records of the City and County of Albany and Colony of Rensselaerswyck," in New York State Library, History Bulletin, Nos. 9-11 (1916-1919), 183; N.Y. Col. Docs., II, 24, 504; Colonial Records, General Entries, I, 54.



But the total populations differed. From 200 persons in 1605, Virginia grew to 5,119 in 1635 to 15,000 in 1648, and to 40,000 in 1665.<sup>1</sup> New Netherland went from 200 in 1626 to 10,000 in 1664.<sup>2</sup> Much of the difference in growth resulted from widespread use of whites as indentured servants in Virginia. One estimate suggested that of 15,000 men who could be mustered in Virginia in 1665, two-thirds were white servants.<sup>3</sup> New Netherland could not match that growth of white labor, but it overmatched Virginia with a population of between 700 to 850 blacks.<sup>4</sup>

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Greene and Harrington, American Population, 136, for 1648; for 1608, see Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus, IV, 1719; for 1635, see George Chalmers, Political Annals of the Present United Colonies, 1607-1763 (London, 1780; New York, 1868), I, 18; for 1665, see "notes on New England" in Library of Congress Transcripts, Egerton Manuscripts, 2395, folio 415.

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Brodhead, History of the State of New York, I, 159, 1625; for 1664, Greene and Harrington, American Population, 88.

3

Ibid., 88, 136.

4

Greene and Harrington, American Population, 88; Van Laer (ed.), "Early Records of the City and County of Albany and Colony of Rensselaerswyck," in New York State Library, History Bulletin, Nos. 9-11 (1916-1919), 183; N.Y. Col. Docs., II, 24, 504; Colonial Records, General Entries, I, 54.

Thus, even if the Company was disappointed with the slave-trading market at Manhattan, it had sold some blacks, and at profitable prices. Prices obtained for blacks at New Amsterdam varied--with world market conditions, with interval between arrival of cargoes, and with the individual characteristics of slaves such as age, health and sex. In general the price of blacks rose in the world market between 1626 and 1664.<sup>1</sup> Male blacks usually were prized over females and the prime age range ran from fourteen to thirty years.<sup>2</sup> Blacks with "experience" brought higher sums, and those "seasoned" by bondage in the West Indies brought more than blacks imported directly from Africa.<sup>3</sup>

The correspondence of Jeremias Van Rensselaer show examples of slave prices. In 1636, Van Rensselaer paid 100 guilders for each

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<sup>1</sup> Valentine, "Slaves and Slave Trading in New Netherland," 584; also see "Slave Prices, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania," in Arthur Zilversmit, The First Emancipation (Chicago, 1967), 231, 243.

<sup>2</sup> Valentine, "Slaves and Slave Trading in New Netherland," 593.

<sup>3</sup> On preponderance of West Indian slaves in New York, see Report of Collector in N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 814; Van Laer, Correspondence of Jeremias Van Rensselaer, 167; also see Valentine, "Slaves and the Slave Trade in New Netherland," 582; and, Edgar J. McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York (Syracuse, 1966), 5-6. For theme of acculturation and its application to slave resistance, see Gerald W. Mullin, Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth Century Virginia (New York, 1972), particularly ch. 5.



male in the prime age range. Ten years later he paid 300 guilders for each slave in the same range.<sup>1</sup> In 1655, the parcel of blacks aboard the White Horse sold for an average of \$125.00.<sup>2</sup> Five years later, according to a letter of Peter Stuyvesant, blacks between ages 16 and 40 years sold for an average of \$180.00. Blacks between 12 and 16 years of age went for \$120.00. Blacks under 12 years of age sold for a maximum of \$90.00.<sup>3</sup> In 1663, a black girl born and raised in the colony brought \$120.00.<sup>4</sup> The Gideon's cargo brought the highest prices reported: \$240.00 for each of several prime black males.<sup>5</sup>

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Van Laer, Correspondence of Jeremias Van Rensselaer, 167; according to I.N.P. Stokes (ed.), Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909 (6 vols.; New York, 1915-1928), IV, 314, 25 guilders equaled \$10.

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Valentine, "Slaves and Slave Trading in New Netherland," 585.

3

Ibid., 593; Van Laer, Correspondence of Jeremias Van Rensselaer, 364-365, quotes price for 12-16 year age range as 450-550 guilders.

4

Valentine, "Slaves and Slave Trading in New Netherland," 594.

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Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 256; payment for slaves was not always in currency, but sometimes was in produce or peltries. For instance, in 1661 there was "offer[ed] at public sale on public account 40 negroes, young and old, male and female, recently arrived from Curacao; payment to be made in beavers or in beef, pork, wheat or peas." Ibid., I, 228.

These prices, when compared to cost for white labor, suggest that an investment in slaves--for those who had the capital--saved money. Annual wages for free labor in New Netherland were slightly less than the purchase price of blacks.<sup>1</sup> During the 1640s, for example, when blacks sold at a maximum of 300 guilders, the per annum of free labor was 280 guilders.<sup>2</sup> In a single year, then, a slave could almost return the purchase price. Taking in account the costs for maintaining slaves--which employers had not to bear with free laborers and which were, at the maximum, one-third of the slave's purchase price--after the first year a slave could save an owner more than half the cost of wages for free labor.

Slaves also saved owners money when compared to the cost of imported indentured whites.<sup>3</sup> The initial cost of indentured white servants was slightly less, on the average, than that for slaves, particularly after 1650. Except for freedom dues--an amount of money or goods given to white servants upon completion of service--the categories of maintenance for servant and slave were about the same, yet owners expended more on the average to maintain servants who could legally protest ill-treatment. Savings from the

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<sup>1</sup> A.J.F. Van Laer (ed.), "Early Records of the City and County of Albany and Colony of Rensselaerswyck," New York State Library, History Bulletin, Nos. 9-11 (1916-1919), 122, 180.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Valentine, "Slaves and Slave Trading in New Netherland," 582-588.



difference between the length of service for slaves and servants made blacks considerably cheaper to own, for slaves served well beyond the two-to-seven year period for servants.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the first blacks in the colony received "half freedom" after about twenty years of service.<sup>2</sup> If owners had invested in indentured servants rather than these slaves, they would have had to purchase at least three servants to match the slaves' period of service. That would have meant an increased cost of the initial price of the servants and the differential of their maintenance over about fourteen years. Thus, the longer the period of service, the larger was the labor cost advantage of using blacks.

Slaves were not only in a comparative sense cheap, they were also versatile. The West India Company employed its many blacks in New Amsterdam in farming, construction, procuring materials such as firewood, in maintenance, and in personal service. Also, the Company employed blacks at public tasks such as road-building and at what might be termed general municipal development.<sup>3</sup> West India

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See Marcus W. Jernegan, Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America (Chicago, 1931), 9-10, 45-48, 52-54. On indentured servants in New Amsterdam, see N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 97-98, 317; on white convict labor see Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 33; and Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 89, 194-195. Also, see Valentine, "Slaves and Slave Trading," 582.

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See Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 36.

3

B. Fernow (ed.), Minutes of the Orphanmasters Court of New Amsterdam (3 vols.; New York, 1916-1924), II, 697-698; Valentine, Manual (1863), 582; Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 231.

Company personnel diverted Company-owned blacks to private use at their homes or on their lands, particularly during harvesting season.<sup>1</sup> Further, several officials, including Peter Stuyvesant, himself, used Company connections to provide themselves with black holdings. Stuyvesant managed at one time to procure forty blacks.<sup>2</sup> Johan Decker, one of Stuyvesant's assistants, used connections through the company to receive a shipment of twenty blacks from Curacao.<sup>3</sup>

The common citizens in New Amsterdam used blacks primarily in domestic service, in garden farming and in trade. The range of domestic service was full: blacks served in every part of the master's home. From personnel services such as cleaning, laundry and repair, to helping in dress and toilet, blacks kept house, cooked and waited on the table. They helped with children, errands and marketing. If the master had a farm in addition to a place in the city, slaves worked there also.

Blacks also worked at trades. This aspect of slave labor was controversial in New Amsterdam, as it was later in New York City. The initial authorization for importing blacks to New Amsterdam

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<sup>1</sup> As an example, see David de Vries, My Third Voyage to America and New Netherland, in New York Historical Society, Collections, 2d ser., III (1857), 89ff.

<sup>2</sup> Edward T. Corwin (ed.), Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York (7 vols.; Albany, 1901-1916), I, 488.

<sup>3</sup> J.H. Innes, Amsterdam and Its People (New York, 1902), 9. X



specified their use in agriculture. Employing them otherwise--aside from personal service, and few in New Netherland could afford that alone--created friction.<sup>1</sup>

Use of blacks as artisans and skilled laborers in New Amsterdam became an explicit issue during 1657. West India Company directors in Holland supported the use of slaves in more skilled work, suggesting that operating losses could be reduced by applying the blacks to "trades such as carpentering, blacksmithing and others."<sup>2</sup> Yet, white laborers in New Amsterdam took affront to the Company's position. The laborers wanted no more competition from blacks. Also, those in New Amsterdam concerned with its settlement by sufficient numbers of whites saw the use of slaves in skilled jobs as a hindrance rather than a help to settlement. For instance, as large a slave-holder as Peter Stuyvesant was, he peremptorily refused the Company's suggestion to use slaves in skilled labor. He had encouraged importation and use of blacks in agriculture. He had brought blacks to the colony and used them himself. Yet, the idea of blacks as artisans was anathema to him, for it meant a significant shift in the present and future structure of settlement. If blacks were allowed to practice skilled trades, Stuyvesant thought, the settlement would stultify, for white skilled labor would be even

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<sup>1</sup>  
N.Y. Col. Docs., XIV, 387.

<sup>2</sup>  
See Stuyvesant to Directors at Amsterdam, ibid.

less willing to migrate to the settlement. And already there were problems attracting such whites. Without them, hopes of building a Dutch colonial community would die. In the short run, then, use of slaves in skilled categories might reduce or reverse Company losses. But, according to Stuyvesant and other New Amsterdammers, in the long run their use meant reduction of the settlement itself. Thus, Peter Stuyvesant replied to the Company's suggestion by saying simply that blacks were not fit for such jobs.<sup>1</sup>

Differences of opinion also arose in New Amsterdam about using blacks in defense of the settlement. This dispute reoccurred later in New York City as well as throughout British America.<sup>2</sup> On more than one occasion, the Dutch in New Amsterdam thought blacks might serve as support in warfare against the Indians. For example, in 1643 settlers suggested that Director-General William Kieft arm selected blacks with axes and half-pikes. But, as hateful of the Indians as Kieft was, he thought it an unnecessary danger to arm blacks against them.<sup>3</sup> Peter Stuyvesant suggested in 1660 that

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Ibid.

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Benjamin Quarles, "The Colonial Militia and Negro Manpower," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 45 (1959), 643-652.

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See "Extracts from the Papers of Director Kieft," N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 415. Also note Kilian Van Rensselaer's order to use slaves "as brute forces against the malevolents," on his manor who refused to pay their quit rents: Van Laer, "Van Rensselaer Bowler Manuscripts," 642.



blacks be used "in the war against the wild barbarians either to pursue them when they run away, or else to carry the soldiers' baggage."<sup>1</sup> Again, however, the blacks did not serve the soldiers, in part because the hostilities were short and in part because many settlers were wary of how armed slaves would affect their security.

While slaves in New Amsterdam were restricted from skilled labors and soldiering, through hiring out they enlarged their range of employment and employers. The Company hired out its blacks and allowed the slaves to hire themselves out.<sup>2</sup> In this way, when its operation was slow, the Company could profit from idle slaves by renting their labor, and someone always seemed willing to hire on slaves. Also, slaves seemed not unwilling to be hired out, for often they received some of the money gained in hiring out and more than a few purchased freedom through this system. Hiring out became, then, an escape from the system of slavery in several ways: it allowed owners to escape maintenance costs during periods when slaves had little useful work; it allowed non-owners to escape the

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See Stuyvesant to Vice-Director at Curacao, N.Y. Col. Docs., XIII, 142-143.

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On evidence for hiring out, see Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 218, 228; Joel Munsell, The Annals of Albany (10 vols.; Albany, 1850-1859), IV, 51; N.Y. Col. Docs., XVI, 35. For connection between hiring out and the urban environment, see Richard C. Wade, Slavery in the Cities (New York, 1964), 38-54. Also see Clement Eaton, "Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step Toward Freedom," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 46 (1960), 663-678.

larger costs of owning slaves permanently; and, finally, it allowed blacks to escape bondage by providing a means through which to purchase freedom.



Liberty for slaves was more easily come by in New Amsterdam than it was later in New York City, for the length of service was less definite than it became under the English.<sup>1</sup> The Dutch used two particular arrangements which modified tenure of service--half-freedom and conditional manumission. Half-freedom was an arrangement of the West India Company by which worktime for blacks was divided in halves, one in which blacks labored for themselves and the other in which they labored for the Company. Begun in 1644 with a group of blacks then 18 or 19 years in service, half-freedom not only provided released time, but through that time, a mechanism for self-purchase and complete freedom. Yet, by the time slaves reached the point of being allowed half-freedom, usually they were beyond their prime and employment was not so easy. Thus, half-freedom had more of the character of semi-retirement than of meaningful manumission. Conditional manumission, the second arrangement, came much closer to freedom for slaves. It provided blacks with a grant of land on the outskirts of the city (in an area

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For an idea of how the length of service came to be determined generally, see Oscar and Mary Handlin, "Origins of the Southern Labor System," William and Mary Quarterly, 7 (1950), 199-222; Paul C. Palmer, "Servant to Slave: The Evolution of the Legal Status of the Negro Laborer in Colonial Virginia," South Atlantic Quarterly, 65 (1966), 355-370; and, Carl N. Degler, "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice," Comparative Studies in History and Society, 2 (1959), 49-66.

called Harlem) as a buffer against Indian attacks. While these blacks still served owners from time to time and surrendered portions of their crops, to a large degree, they were at liberty.<sup>1</sup>

Neither half-freedom nor conditional manumission freed slave offspring from service. Under both arrangements children were "bound and obligated to serve the honourable West India Company as slaves."<sup>2</sup> As long as that existed, the liberties of slaves in either arrangement were limited. For who could live and love freely where their children were enslaved? But, in the last year of Dutch control, the Company granted unconditional emancipation to those on half-freedom and conditional manumission. This resulted from some sentiment among the settlers that these slaves should be set completely free, and from the Company's view that since the slaves seemed virtually free, it might best ratify reality.<sup>3</sup>

Yet there was another point. The number of blacks in the settlement was growing, as were problems with control. Freeing a few blacks provided some sense of reward for good service. The newly arrived slaves could then have some model that might suggest

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<sup>1</sup> Laws and Ordinances of New Netherlands, 36-37, 60; O'Callaghan, Voyages of the Slaver, 13; Valentine, Manual (1866), 573-575.

<sup>2</sup> "Remonstrance of New Netherland," N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 302, 335, 343.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., II, 768; Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 269.



bondage was not forever. Thus, in 1664 the Company created a population of freed blacks just in time for the beginning of New York City.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps creating a free black population would have been a successful element of control for the Dutch, for New Amsterdam had smaller problems with slaves than New York City. But it was degree and detail which marked the difference between the Dutch and English problems and, of course, the size of the population figured significantly in the difference. Prohibitions in New Amsterdam were few and so, too, were punishments. By and large, public mischief by slaves seldom occurred. The Dutch apparently allowed blacks enough freedom to live within the law. Such freedom was later proscribed in New York City, as under the English slaves became unregenerate lawbreakers.<sup>2</sup>

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See Ibid., I, 162, 368; Minutes of the Orphanmasters Court, II, 46; Records of New Amsterdam, VII, 11; Ellis Raesly, Portrait of New Netherland (New York, 1945), 162.

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On Dutch concern with constant supervision of slaves, see N.Y. Col. Docs., 39, 65; Olson, "Negro Slavery in New York," 24-25, suggested that "If for no other reason...[Dutch] business considerations must have dictated a policy of kindness and leniency towards its bondsmen as long as they rendered reasonable efficient service. No legal restrictions were placed upon their freedom of motion or assembly, which is understandable in view of the small number. In common with all New Netherland slaves they were allowed to marry and to acquire and hold property."

New Amsterdam's few recorded acts of slave crime show the apparent effectiveness of the general rule of the settlement that "each and every one must refrain from Fighting, Adultery, Inter-course with Heathens, Blacks, and Other Persons."<sup>1</sup> Recorded crimes by blacks in New Amsterdam included relatively minor breaches of the peace, such as drunkenness, but also more serious acts such as arson, murder, theft, sexual perversion and that act common in slave systems--running away. Punishments were not so severe as later in New York City, and recalcitrant or chronically disobedient blacks usually were sold outside the settlement.<sup>2</sup>

Thefts and acts of attempted arson in New Amsterdam were repeated without serious results. For example, a female slave called Lysbet confessed to setting fire to her owner's house in 1664, and although a court sentenced her "to be conveyed to the place of execution, there chained to the stake, strangled, and then burnt," she was only mocked with punishment. After taking Lysbet to the stake and chaining her, the authorities released her.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 162.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., I, 112, 258-259; Valentine, Manual (1849), 422; Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 258-259.



There was only one case of murder and one of sexual perversion in which blacks were accused, and neither case involved a white. The murder occurred in 1641 and, while the perpetrator was sentenced to death, he was not executed, but rather was deported from the settlement.<sup>1</sup> The case of sexual perversion was an instance of sodomy in 1646 involving an adult male and a ten-year old boy. As punishment the man was choked to death and his body burned; the boy was mocked with burning and then flogged.<sup>2</sup>

Runaways were the most serious slave problem for the Dutch. The unsettled surroundings provided a common attraction to runaways. In addition, New Amsterdam's position among somewhat unsympathetic English neighbors contributed to the problem of runaways. More than once the English on Long Island and Maryland encouraged Dutch-owned blacks to run away. Such occurrences provoked Peter Stuyvesant in 1650 to threaten Governor William Stone of Maryland with retaliation

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., I, 74; the case occurred in 1641: "Manuel the Giant" while sentenced to death was not actually executed, although he was taken to the gibbet and had the noose fitted tightly around his neck. Also see Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts, 802. For a different version, see McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, I, 103.

by "advertising free liberty, access and recess to all servants, fugitives, and runaways" from Maryland.<sup>1</sup> But not only did English neighbors encourage blacks to abscond, so did settlers in other parts of New Netherland. Whether with anti-slavery inclinations or simply with the idea of using black labor, settlers outside the city assisted runaways so much that a fine of fifty guilders was established in 1648 as a prohibition against such assistance.<sup>2</sup>

When slaves did not resort to flight but to other means of escaping their servitude, such as shirking and malingering, the Dutch had problems which increased in frequency in New York City and became compounded with crime. Also, there were problems with personal behavior and attitude, problems of the sort that had to do with mores.

The Dutch considered certain ways of behavior for slaves conducive to the welfare of society and sought to inculcate those ways. One method of inculcation was religious conversion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
N.Y. Col. Docs., II, 82.

<sup>2</sup>  
Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 24, 32.

<sup>3</sup>  
Conversion of blacks in New York City is discussed below, particularly in chapter III. On question of conversion among English colonists see Marcus W. Jernegan, "Slavery and Conversion in the American Colonies," American Historical Review, 21 (1916), 504-527. For an important discussion of religion and social control among blacks, although not in the time period under discussion here, see Vincent Harding, "Religion and Resistance among Antebellum Negroes, 1800-1860," in August Meier and Elliott Rudwick (eds.), The Making of Black America (New York, 1969). For discussion in



Ironically, however, while conversion seemed a method of control, it was also meat for controversy. The relation of blacks to religion raised questions among the Dutch--as it did among other groups--as to the influence of conversion on the enslaved. Few whites doubted that baptism somewhat affected blacks' behavior. Yet, many whites worried over the implications of conversion for the blacks' status.<sup>1</sup>

In Western culture heathenism long had been a justification for enslavement.<sup>2</sup> So, as long as blacks remained unconverted, the

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New Amsterdam see Edward Bogardus's appeal in 1636 for blacks, as well as the Dutch colonists, to be provided instruction "in the knowledge of Jesus Christ": Van Twiller to the Amsterdam Chamber, in New York Historical Society Quarterly, 1 (1919), 48; also, see N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 335.

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As a specific example, see discussion of colonial Virginia in Mary F. Goodwin, "Christianizing and Educating the Negro in Colonial Virginia," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, I (1932), 143-152; and, Jerome W. Jones, "The Established Virginia Church and the Conversion of Negroes and Indians, 1620-1760," Journal of Negro History, 46 (1961), 12-23. On New Amsterdam, see Charles Corwin, "Efforts of the Dutch Colonial Pastors for the Conversion of the Negroes," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, 12 (1927), esp. 428-429.

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See David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966), 62-90, 223-290.

Dutch and other whites had little problem with justifying enslavement. But if blacks were converted to Christianity, that removed at least one explicit aspect presented as justification of enslavement. The Dutch decided--as the English would later--on an ambivalent stand toward the conversion of blacks. They decided to allow it, but they decided also that it would have no affect on the legality of enslavement. As a result, conversion of blacks usually meant nothing more than the formal ceremony of sprinkling water and some cursory instruction.<sup>1</sup>

Nor were blacks less ambivalent about conversion. Dutch colonial pastors in New Amsterdam made some efforts to give instruction, preferring their own rituals and beliefs. Nevertheless, several black parents, while shunning Christianity for themselves, did encourage the baptism and instruction of their children, perhaps thinking that at some time in the future the children would benefit. Whatever benefits that may have accrued, however, existed only in the spiritual realm and did not affect the status of slaves within the settlement.<sup>2</sup>

The Dutch had not to worry much about the consequences of conversion or about justification of slavery for, at about the time the two issues began to concern the community, the English took

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Jernegan, "Slavery and Conversion;" also see Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York, I, 508, 548-549.

2  
Corwin, "Efforts of the Dutch Colonial Pastors for the Conversion of the Negroes," 429.



over New Amsterdam. It was left to them to decide on the consequences and the legal structure of slavery. And little time elapsed before the English made their decisions on slavery in the City clear. They felt a need for slaves as substitute laborers in economic growth crucial to successful colonial settlement, and during the first half-century of their control in New York City the English went about providing structures to meet labor needs with slaves.

## III

## THE FIRST HALF-CENTURY UNDER THE ENGLISH

During their first half-century of control in New York the English established slavery as a legal institution of labor supply and social control, something the Dutch had not done. Primarily entrepreneurs concerned more with practice than philosophy, more with risks for profits than with regulation of population, the Dutch had operated without filling out a detailed legal system to structure the colonial society and economy.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in time they would have. They did provide the English with the reality of a slave population, with examples of the use of slave labor, and with indications of the problems with slaves. The English employed the Dutch provisions along with the experiences of their own countrymen in the colonies to legislate the principles of Negro slavery in New York and to try to cope with the troublesomeness of slaves.

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Bertus H. Wabeke, Dutch Emigration to North America, 1624-1860 (New York, 1944), 17-24; Van Cleaf Bachman, Peltries or Plantations: The Economic Policies of the Dutch West India Company in New Netherland, 1623-1639 (Baltimore, 1969), *passim*, esp. chs. 1 & 2; Thomas J. Condon, New York Beginnings: The Commercial Origins of New Netherland (New York, 1968).



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It was clear to the English that Negro slaves would serve as substitute laborers since the colony had too few whites to fill the wide range of needed labor.<sup>1</sup> A listing of 582 persons

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Samuel D. McKee, Jr., Labor in Colonial New York, 1664-1776 (New York, 1935) presents the fullest discussion available on labor. Also see George Daitsman, "Labor in the 'Welfare State' in Early New York," Labor History, 4 (1963), 248-256; Charles M. Haar, "White Indentured Servants in Colonial New York," Americana, 34 (1940), 370-392; and, Richard B. Morris, Government and Labor in Early America (New York, 1946). Several general histories of the City also are informative on this aspect; see: Maria G. Van Rensselaer, History of the City of New York in the Seventeenth Century (2 vols.; New York, 1909); Martha J. Lamb, History of the City of New York (3 vols.; New York, 1867); and, Arthur E. Peterson and George W. Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality (New York, 1917). On description of the City, its people and its needs, several sources should be noted from the outset. The earliest record of the name of New York (spelled "Jorck") appeared in minutes dated 16 September 1664 in City court: see Berthold Fernow (ed.), Records of New Amsterdam, 1653-1674 (7 vols.; New York, 1897), V, 116. For distribution of persons in the City see the partial but earliest known, street directory formed by a "List of the Burghers and Inhabitants of this City," ibid., 221-225. Also see James G. Wilson (ed.), Memorial History of the City of New York (4 vols.; New York, 1892-1893), I, 220; David T. Valentine, Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York (New York, 1849), 356-359, (1850), 452, (1858), 503-506, (1861), 613-621. Two other lists made for a record of the "Watch" also are informative: "The having a Watch kept to prevent Disorders by night bee left to farther Consideration; but for the present That the Sherriffe of ye City doe take an Exact list of ye Inhabitants & Burghers in Each Street of the Towne, & make Returne thereof to the Governor," in Victor Paltsits (ed.), Minutes of the Executive Council of the Province of New York, 1668-1673 (2 vols.; Albany, 1910), I, 58. For the other list, see E.B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow (eds.), Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York (14 vols.; Albany, 1856-1857), II, 573-575, 685. See Albert E. McKinley, "The Transition from Dutch to English Rule in New York," American Historical Review, 6 (1900), 693-724. See first description of New York printed in English: Daniel Denton, A Brief Description of New York Formally Called New-Netherlands. With the Places thereunto

admitted to the "freedom" of the City in eighty trades between 27 March 1694 and 3 September 1706 illustrated the scope of the need.<sup>1</sup> There were 63 merchants, 51 cordwainers, 50 mariners, 46 carpenters, 33 bakers, 25 victuallers, 24 bricklayers, 23 blacksmiths, 19 carmen, 16 yeomen, 15 tailors, 14 butchers, 12 coopers, 12 surgeons, 11 joiners, 10 bolters; 9 each of shiprights, silversmiths, and weavers; 7 each of masons, schoolmasters, ship carpenters, and turners; 6 tallow candler, 5 periwig makers, 4 brewers, 4 shopkeepers; 3 each of barbers, boatmen, saddlers, sail makers, porters, pot makers and vintners; 2 each of block

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Adjoyning. Together with the Manner of its Situation, Fertility of the Soyle, Healthfulness of the Climate, and the Commodities thence produced. Also Some Direction and Advice to Such as shall go thither: An Account of what Commodities they shall take with them: The Profit and Pleasure what may accrew to them thereby, likewise a Brief Relation of the Customs of the Indians There (London, 1780), esp. 2-3, 17-19. Also see Arnoldus Montanue, De Nieuwe En Obekende Weerld: of Beschriiving van America (Holland, 1671), translated partially in E.B. O'Callaghan, Documentary History of the State of New York (4 vols; Albany, 1850), IV, 75; Richard Blome, The Present State of His Majesties Isles and Territories in America (London, 1797), esp. 201-209; The Rev. Charles Wooley, A.M., A Two Year Journal in New York (London, 1701); and, Robert Burton, The English Empire in America (London, 1698), 76-81.

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The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866, New York Historical Society, Collections, 18 (1885), 56-87. A version of the list appears also in McKee, Labor in Colonial New York, 30.



makers, confectioners, curriers, gunners, hatters, laborers, limners, pewterers, ropemakers, wheelwrights, and woodcombers; and one each of apothecary, brazier, brickmaker, combmaker, corn measurer, cutter, distiller, dresser, mathematician, maulster, miller, painter, pavier, pipe maker, pumpmaker, printer, reedmaker, seamstress, stationer, stone cutter, storekeeper, tobacconist, upholsterer, watchmaker, whiting maker, and wine cooper. These persons filled only part of the City's needs and more labor was sought.<sup>1</sup>

Immigrants provided some labor, so also did indentured servants. But too few of the first came to the City or, for that matter, to the Province.<sup>2</sup> In 1699 the Provincial Governor, Richard Coote, Earl of Bellomont, reported that the entire

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On the search for labor, see "An Address by Gov. Richard Ingoldesby and Council to the King," 6 August 1691, in N.Y. Col. Docs., III, 796-800; also, description of conditions of New York given to the Lords of Trade, ibid., IV, 31-33; and, Gov. Benjamin Fletcher's Report of 9 October 1693, ibid., IV, 55, in addition to his comment in 1606 that "The town of Philadelphia in fourteen years time is become near equal to the City of New York in trade and Riches," ibid., IV, 158-159. See survey of New York's commercial prosperity in papers compiled as a report of "The Committee for repeal of the Bolting Act of 1694," Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York 1675-1776 (8 vols.; New York, 1905), II, 35-43. Also, see "An Act for Encouraging the City of New York," Colonial Laws of New York from 1664 to the Revolution (5 vols.; Albany, 1894), I, 449; and, McKee, Labor in Colonial New York, esp. 13-14, 23-24.

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On general growth of New York, especially in a comparative view, see Stella H. Sutherland, Population Distribution in Colonial America (New York, 1936), and J. Potter, "The Growth of Population in America, 1700-1860," in D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley (eds.), Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography (Chicago, 1965); McKee, Labor in Colonial New York, 10ff.

Province of New York had not a hundred available laborers, even at what he considered the exorbitant wage of three shillings a day.<sup>1</sup> Neither was the available number of indentured servants satisfactory. Moreover, their cost was considerable, particularly in comparison with another source of labor familiar to the City--enslaved blacks.<sup>2</sup>

Blacks were available virtually on demand, and as the City's need for labor increased so did its black population.<sup>3</sup> Between

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Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies (42 vols.; London, 1860-1953), 1699, 176, 317. In 1701, writing to the Lords of Trade, Robert Livingston noted that: "a labouring man at New York has 3s a day and a soldier's week's subsistence is about 3s 6d which with ease they consume in two days, and this is a great cause of their disertation," N.Y. Col. Docs., IV, 877-878. Also, see merchant's petition on "Decay of Trade," ibid., 624, and response, 725-726.

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Charles Haar, "White Indentured Servants in Colonial New York," 370-392; McKee, Labor in Colonial New York, 89-113, esp., 93-95; importation of indentured servants was encouraged, see Journal of Legislative Council of the Colony of New York (2 vols.; Albany, 1861), I, 333; Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1696-1697, 559.

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On use of blacks, see N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 98; V, 136. Also, see Robert Haywood, "Mercantilism and Colonial Slave Labor, 1700-1763," Journal of Southern History, 23 (1957), 454-464. On slave trade in the City at this time (and, note, it was a regular commercial endeavor), see "Journal" of John Cruger--later Mayor--on a slave trading voyage from July 1698 to May 1700 in Valentine, Manual (1853), 406ff; also, "Slaves and Slavery in New Amsterdam," ibid. (1858), 506ff; and, "Slavery in New York," ibid. (1861), 700ff; (1863), 582-595. Also see Kenneth G. Davies, The Royal African Company (London, 1957); James Pope-Hennessy, Sins of the Fathers: A Study of the Atlantic Slave Traders, 1441-1807 (New York, 1968); and, McKee, Labor in Colonial New York, 114-169.



1665 and 1712 the number of blacks in the City increased eight-fold, rising from about 120 to 960. At the same time, the white population of the City fell just short of doubling, growing from about 2400 to 4478. Thus, by 1712 blacks comprised almost eighteen percent of the City's total population.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the City took a larger share of the Province's total slave-population. In 1665 the City contained 14.8 percent of all blacks in New York Province. By 1703 the City's share was 26.4 percent. In 1712 the census lacked returns from several counties which reduced the Province totals and inflated the City's share. On the published returns New York City had 44.5 percent of all blacks reported. Even allowing for the missing returns its share still was considerable. The City contained at least a third of the blacks in the Province by 1712.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On 1664 see, E.B. O'Callaghan, History of New Netherland (2 vols.; New York, 1846-1848), II, 540. For 1698, see Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1697-1698, 532; on 1703 and 1712, see Doc. Hist. N.Y., I, 691. The exact number of slaves for 1665 and 1712 is an estimation; also, note that the 1665 population figure is given after dispersal of the Gideon's cargo. Gerbert A. Whitney, "Estimating Precensus Populations: A Method Suggested and Applied to the Towns of Rhode Island and Plymouth Colonies in 1689," Association of American Geographers, Annals, 55 (1965), 179-189.

<sup>2</sup> Percentages based on population figures found in places cited in preceding note.

The increased number of blacks meant problems of competition and control.<sup>1</sup> White laborers in New York City on many occasions during the colonial period protested employment of blacks at anything which competed with them. The "Sworn porters," for instance, protested in 1686 that they were losing work as a result of blacks being employed "to work on the bridge Weighhouse and Market House of this City about the goods of their respective Masters."<sup>2</sup> In response to the complaint the Common Council governing the City instructed "no Negro or Slave...to work on the bridge as a porter about any goods wither imported or exported from or into this City."<sup>3</sup> Even so, in 1691 the "Sworn porters" still complained competition with blacks "so much impoverished them, that they Cannot by their labours get a competency for the Maintenance of themselves and Family's."<sup>4</sup>

The problem of competition did not go away during the colonial years, rather it grew into a dilemma. On the one side, there simply

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Part of the problem of control involved complaints about labor relations: for general situation, see McKee, Labor in Colonial New York, 127, 129-130; and, Morris, Government and Labor in Early America, 183.

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M.C.C., I, 179.

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Ibid.

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Ibid., I, 220.



were not enough white laborers to handle the demand in the City. To get work done meant use of blacks. But, on the other hand, the use of blacks so irritated white laborers that some left the City for opportunities elsewhere, either to work for higher wages unrestrained by slave competition or to take land and work for themselves. Further, white laborers coming to British America turned away from the City and competition with blacks. They looked for the highest wages or for self-employment or for cheap land. Thus, during the colonial period the effect of the competition stimulated more widespread use of slaves. Its most important impact came after Independence when immigration sharpened the edge of competition, pushed antislavery and promoted segregation. Yet competition between free and slave labor was, during the colonial years, a less important problem than slave control.

Control of slaves in colonial New York City rested on two bases--power and principle. No system could develop without both. The regular, orderly functioning of a society with slavery demanded a logical plan to link the two and a method to implement the plan. Between 1665 and 1712 New York took pains to establish both. It needed classification to identify slaves, standards to fix conduct and social relationships, and rules to restrain slaves.<sup>1</sup>

When the English took control of the City most blacks were slaves. What precisely that meant at the time was uncertain however. There were free blacks, about three dozen whom the Dutch had released from bondage. Also, Negroes were not the only human beings supposedly owned by others. Indians and whites, too, had been captured, purchased or born into a status divested of liberty

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On development of Negro slavery along the lines discussed here, see Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill, 1968), esp. 83-85 and 91-98, "Racial Slavery: From Reason to Rationale;" on New York Province, see Edgar J. McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York (Syracuse, 1966), 79-99; also, Arnold A. Sio, "Interpretations of Slavery: The Slave Status in the Americas," Comparative Studies in History and Society, 7 (1965), 289-308. And see E.B. O'Callaghan, Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 1638-1674 (Albany, 1868), 33, 36-37, 60; Valentine, Manual (1863), 582ff; Edward T. Corwin (ed.), Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York (7 vols.; Albany, 1901-1916), I, 142, 150, 489, 508, 548; J. Franklin Jameson (ed.), Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664 (New York, 1909), 329, 330, 364; Wilbert E. Moore, "Slave Law and the Social Structure," Journal of Negro History, 26 (1941), 171-202.



and personal rights. Yet the contrast between blacks and whites and Indians became boundaries in a series of divisions which set blacks alone as slaves.<sup>1</sup>

The Duke's Laws of March 1665 announced the first divisions.<sup>2</sup> "No Christian," the Laws stated, "shall be kept in Bond-Slavery except such who shall be judged thereto by authority, or such as willingly have sold or shall sell themselves."<sup>3</sup> In so dividing the liabilities of Christians from non-Christians the law reflected a long-established tradition in Western culture that paganism was a basis for enslavement.<sup>4</sup> But the law also divided red and black

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Almon W. Lauber, Indian Slavery Within the Colonial Limits of the Present United States (New York, 1913), 317; Abbott Emerson Smith, Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America, 1607-1776 (Chapel Hill, 1947), 105, 309-315; McKee, Labor in Colonial New York, 89-113; Haar, "White Indentured Servants in Colonial New York;" in addition, see N.Y. Col. Docs., XII, 537; M.C.C., I, 80.

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On Duke's Laws, see Col. Laws N.Y., I, 6-100.

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Ibid., 157.

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See David B. Davis, The History of Slavery in Western Culture (Ithaca, 1964).

Christians from white Christians by stating that "This law shall not set at liberty any Negro or Indian Slave, who shall have turned Christian after they had been bought by any person."<sup>1</sup> The impact of that qualification had the force of allowing Indians and Negroes to be Christian and also to be slaves.<sup>2</sup> Thus, red men and black men were essentially separated from whites as bondsmen.

A presumption of color came with the first divisions: to be other than white led to doubts about status.<sup>3</sup> In 1677 a court case explicitly illustrated one side of the presumption--to appear

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<sup>1</sup>  
Col. Laws N.Y., I, 157.

<sup>2</sup>  
Marcus W. Jernegan, "Slavery and Conversion in the Colonies," American Historical Review, 21 (1916), 504; Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1699, 176; Eccles., Recs. N.Y., I, 489; II, 916, 954, 1034; Col. Laws N.Y., I, 596-598.

<sup>3</sup>  
E.B. O'Callaghan (ed.), Calendar of Historical Manuscripts in the Office of the Secretary of State (2 vols.; Albany, 1866), II, 56; Thomas R.R. Cobb, An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States of America (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1858), I, 263, 278; McKee, Labor in Colonial New York, passim.; Jernegan, Laboring and Dependent Classes, passim.; Morris, Government and Labor in Early America, ch. IX, "The Legal Status of Servitude;" Jordan, White Over Black, 48-56, 83-85, 91-100, and "Slavery and the Senses of the Laws," 103-110; and, Degler, "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice," Comparative Studies in History and Society, 2 (1950), 49-66.



white was not to appear a slave. The case involved Thomas Thatcher and a white looking man whom Thatcher claimed to own as a mulatto. The court ruled that in view of the apparent whiteness of the defendant Thatcher would have to prove his claim, and he was given eight days to do so. In the meantime the man was presumed free and set at liberty. Unfortunately, no record appears of the ultimate decision in the case. The preliminaries, however, contrast sharply with later cases where any amount of blackness was taken as prima facie evidence that a person was a slave.<sup>1</sup> Shortly, "Negro" became synonymous with "slave," and government documents frequently reflected that usage, employing categories such as "slaves and other Negroes."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, in terms of the presumption of color blacks became distinguished not only from whites but, also, from Indians. Seeking to eliminate the presence of Indians as slaves, a New York law of 1680 stated (contrary to historical truth) that "all Indians here have always been free, and not slaves--except such as have been formerly brought from the [Hudson's] Bay or Foreign Parts." The law further declared that "if any [Indians] shall be brought hereafter into the government within the space of six months, they are to be disposed of as soon as may be out of the government." After those six months, "all [Indians] that shall

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<sup>1</sup> Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, II, 56; Cobb, Inquiry into the Laws of Slavery, I, 67.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see N.Y. Doc. Hist., I, 693.

be brought here from those parts and landed, [were] to be as other free Indians." This left blacks as the only people who would continue to be enslaved in New York.<sup>1</sup>

What it meant to be enslaved became more clear during 1684 with passage of "A Bill Concerning Masters[,] servants[,] Labourers and Apprentices."<sup>2</sup> The law set slaves off from all others.

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The Provincial Council resolved on 5 December 1679 that Indians were free and not slaves, nor could they be forced to be servants, except those brought from foreign lands, and that practice was not supposed to continue longer than six months: Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, II, 81-82, 86; also, see "Extracts from Papers of Director Kieft," N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 415; and, Valentine, Manual (1870), 764-765. Note also that the practice of enslaving Indians had shown itself during Dutch rule, especially under Director William Kieft who was notorious for provoking the Algonquians. An example of what the Dutch did with Indians captured in battle is described in a communication of eight New Amsterdamers to the West India Company Director in Holland during 1644. "The captured Indians, who might have been of considerable use to us as guides," complained the citizens, "have been given to the soldiers as presents, and allowed to go to Holland; the others have been sent to the Bermudas as a present to the English governor." Quoted in E.V. Morgan, "Slavery in New York," Half Moon Series, 2 (1898), 23-24. Also see Iu. P. Averkieva, "Slavery among the Indians of North America," in Robin W. Winks (ed.), Slavery: A Comparative Perspective (New York, 1972), 165-170. ^

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Col. Laws N.Y., I, 157-159. The status of laborer and apprentice as "free" had been marked out as "Freedom" was restricted: see McKee, Labor in Colonial New York, 22, 170-171. Among the earlier printed ordinances of the City was one in 1694 entitled, "Negroes[:] Several Orders Concerning them," important in this connection, M.C.C., I, 371-372; also note that only Englishmen (including those naturalized and denizens) were allowed to "Freedom," ibid., 302; see brief account with quotations from Chamber's Encyclopedia (London, 1888), II, 554 and New International Encyclopedia (New York, 1915), IX, 219-220, in I.N.P. Stokes, v



Laborers were wage-earners. Apprentices were students of a sort and had legal agreements for instruction and support. Servants under indenture were bound voluntarily and only for a specified number of years. Further, they had legal rights as persons within the society which protected them and guaranteed them against abusive treatment. For instance, the law provided that

always if any master or Dame shall Tyrannically & Creully abuse their servants or not allow them sufficient Provisions or apparell[,] upon Complaint by such servant or servants to any Justice of the Peace the said Justice may bind the said master or Dame over to the Next sessions[,] then and there to answer the premises[;] and if upon hearing the matter the complaint be found true[,] the Court may order the said Master or Dame to give in Good security for their better abearing themselves towards their said servants for the ffuture[,] and upon the Parties Refusall to give in such security

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Iconography of Manhattan Island (6 vols.; New York, 1895-1928), IV, 434. On naturalization, see an act "for Naturalizing all Protestants of Forreign Birth now Inhabiting within this colony," Col. Laws N.Y., I, 858. For "The Oath of a Freeman of the City of New York," see M.C.C., II, 455, 392. For City regulation of apprentices for years 1694-1707, see New York Historical Society, Collections (1885), 565. Also, see Cora Start, "Naturalization in the English Colonies of America," American Historical Association, Annual Report for 1893 (1894), 317-338; Edward A. Hoyt, "Naturalization under the English Colonies: Signs of a New Community," Political Science Quarterly, 67 (1952), 248-266.

as aforesaid The Court may and shall have power by virtue of this Act to set the said servant or servants att Liberty and ffree him or them from any ffurther service to his or their said Master or Dame.<sup>1</sup>

Slaves had not such provisions opened to them.

Law only incidentally recognized slave personality. Persons owned them and had complete legal power of possession, use and disposal. Slaves had no rights under law, whether in or outside court. They could not testify

in any matter, Cause or thing whatsoever, excepting Cases of Plotting or Confederacy amongst themselves, either to run away, kill or destroy their Master or Mistress, or burning of houses, or barnes or barracks or Corn, or the killing of their Master's or Mistress's Cattle and that against one another, in w'ch Case the Evidence of one slave be allowed against another slave.<sup>2</sup>

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Col. Laws N.Y., I, 157. This provision was used too! An example of suit, entertaining in its particulars, occurred during May 1689 between the soon famous Jacob Leisler and a maid servant demanding a year's wage of 100 guilders on account of her recent discharge. Leisler argued that he wanted nothing more to do with the woman as she had eaten "almost a bottle or preserved strawberries, also biscuits of his," in addition to scandalizing him by receiving two men who climbed over the wall while he and his wife were at church on Sundays. She denied all, and the court awarded her a quarter-year's pay. See Rec. N. Am., V 77-78, 84.

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Col. Laws N.Y., I, 519-521.



Neither could slaves sue, protest or petition. They could make no contract, including marriage. They could not own, buy or sell property for themselves. They were itemized as possessions in wills, in tax lists and in other assessments. A law stated the slaves' position flatly in 1702: they were "the property of Christians." They were virtual non-persons.<sup>1</sup>

Yet slaves were human--regardless what laws decreed--and that had to be taken into account. It was, mostly in what seem now the "cruel and unusual" punishments typical of those prescribed by the penal code in England and other European countries at the time.<sup>2</sup> Whipping, breaking on the wheel, maiming, branding, castration, pilloring and torture, such as wrenching, all were used. So were hanging and burning at the stake, they were the

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Ibid.

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Governor Cornbury's Royal Instructions contained a recommendation for a law "for restraining of any inhuman Severity, which by ill masters or Overseers may be used toward their Christian Servants and their Slaves, and...that the willfull killing of Indians and Negroes may be punished with death": see, "Instructions for Edward Hyde Esqr. commonly called Lord Cornbury (Son and Heir apparent to ye Earl of Clarendon) Our Captain Generall and Governor in Chief of Our Province of New York and the Territorys depending thereon in America," New York Historical Society, Collections (1909), 28. In reference to punishment, for specified offenses the City maintained "a Ducking Stolle...upon the Warfe before the Town house," M.C.C., I, 238, 253, and "A Pillory Cage Ducking Stolle," M.C.C., I, 267, in addition to the whipping-posts, Peterson and Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality, 195-196. Women had their own sets of stools and posts, see Arnold J. Van Laer (ed.), "Calendar of Council Minutes, 1668-1783,"

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ultimate punishment--execution--which whites used unsparingly in times of stress. Also, the law declared in 1706 that "all and every Negro, Mulatto, and mestee [a mixture of Indian and Negro], bastard child and children, who is, are, and shall be born of any Negro, Indian, or mestee, shall follow the state and condition of the mother."<sup>1</sup> Thus, a unique punishment singularly emphasized slaves' humanity: heredity condemned them to perpetuate their bondage.

The value of slaves somewhat muted punishment, however. Under usual circumstances authorities avoided execution, for the owners of executed slaves legally were entitled to compensation for their loss of property.<sup>2</sup> The unfortunate slave's value, appraised according to a standard set by law, was paid by levy on the slave-

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New York State Library, History Bulletin (1902), 70. Whipping also was done with "Burch Rodds," Minutes General Sessions of the Peace, 2 Feb. 1698, 27 Feb. 1701, 4 August 1696; also see Julius Goebel and T. Raymond Naughton, Law Enforcement in Colonial New York (New York, 1944), and George A. Billias (ed.), Law and Authority in Colonial America (Barre, Mass., 1965).

<sup>1</sup>  
Col. Laws N.Y., 598.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., I, 584.



holders in the City, except in cases of insurrection when the provincial government paid the compensation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, authorities invoked a special set of penalties against slaves, in some cases mitigating punishment. For instance, where the liability was death for anyone else,

If any slave by Theft or other Trespass [declared the law in 1702] shall damnifie any p'son or P'sons to the value of five pounds, or under, the Master or Mistress of such shall be lyable to make satisfaction for such damage to the party injured... and the slave shall receive Corporal Punishment, at Discretion of a Justice of the Peace, and immediately thereafter be permitted to attend his or her Master or Mistress service, without further punishment.<sup>2</sup>

In that way the cost factor forced the law to recognize that "slaves... cannot without great loss or detriment to their Masters or Mistresses, be subjected in all Cases Criminal, to the strict Rules of the Laws of England."<sup>3</sup>

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N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 524.

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Col. Laws N.Y., I, 520-521.

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Ibid., 520.

3.

Owners and Justices shared judgment of slaves in colonial New York City, but the two played different roles. Justices handled public misbehavior. Owners settled more encompassing issues, for they had ultimate responsibility for slaves. Everything the slave did was, at least theoretically, attached to the owner whom society charged with development of discipline and self-control in the slave. With that charge owners received rights from society to "punish their slaves for their crimes of discretion, not extending to life or member."<sup>1</sup> For everyday misbehavior, then, owners meted out punishment. When their chastening of slaves failed, owners sold slaves away or Justices took over with castigation.

Even while inflicting punishment, owners maintained that slaves were obliged to them and to the society. Owners thought in return for food, clothing, shelter and the benefits of "civilization" slaves should be faithful and obedient. Some were: their owners recorded the faithfulness and obedience. Others were not. Their owners reported continual disaffection.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Laws N.Y., I, 520-521; Olson, "The Slave Code in Colonial New York," 147-150.

<sup>2</sup> On justification of slavery, see Jordan, White Over Black, particularly in relation to discussion here, 83-110. Of course the views of the owner found classic statement later in the slave South: see Eric L. McKittrick (ed.), Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963). On prevalence of



No single or set stereotype adequately covers the variety of interaction between owners and slaves in colonial New York City. On both sides behavior varied greatly. Behind the behavior were beliefs not fully recorded. What motivated slaves, what they thought they were doing, what they meant to do—for instance, cannot be completely recreated.<sup>1</sup> What they did reflected, as well as history can determine, what they thought. Duplicity, no doubt, played a part in slave behavior. So, also, did abundant slave crime.

Ample evidence supports the statement that superior force and nothing more bound blacks in slavery. Not love, not loyalty, not faithfulness, not a sense of obligation—only force maintained enslavement. Blacks were not slaves by choice; they were slaves by coercion. When and where coercion failed, their enslavement failed. Also see similar cases described by C. Vann Woodward, "The Negro in Colonial America," *Journal of Negro History*, 37 (1962), 6-10. On general discussion, see Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1918), 454. Also, see Stanley Elkins, *Slavery* (Chicago, 1959); John Brace, Jr., August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick, *American Slavery: The Question of Resistance* (Belmont, Calif., 1971); and, Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, ch. III, "The Machinery of Control;" Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York, 1956), chs. 3 and 4.

The society recognized the centrality of coercion. It hoped to cover over the stark reality, condition blacks to the functions of slave crime, even Ulrich B. Phillips stated that "investigation reveals crime in abundance": American Negro Slavery (New York, 1918), 454. Also, see Stanley Elkins, Slavery (Chicago, 1959); John Brace, Jr., August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick, American Slavery: The Question of Resistance (Belmont, Calif., 1971); and, Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, ch. III, "The Machinery of Control;" Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution (New York, 1956), chs. 3 and 4.

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For a suggestion of some answers to these questions in the antebellum South, see John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community (New York, 1972).

of slavery and have them adopt the patterns, concepts, skills and training owners desired of them.<sup>1</sup> Yet the society was not sure how that would, or could, be done. Blacks continuously troubled the system. More and more whites worried that slaves were driving, perhaps irresistibly, toward liberty, toward being different from what the society directed.<sup>2</sup>

Danger lurked constantly in the drive by slaves to free themselves from society's fetters. Whites felt the constant danger and tried to minimize it, especially its potential as black violence. Whites worried especially about being outnumbered, overwhelmed or outmaneuvered by slaves. Their greatest fear was armed, organized

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On hopes for acculturation, see Jordan, White Over Black, 83-110. Also see similar cases described by Gerald Mullin, Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth Century Virginia (New York, 1972). Louis Ruchames, "The Source of Racial Thought in Colonial America," Journal of Negro History, 52 (1967), 251-272; E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro in the United States (2nd. ed.; New York, 1957), 8-10. On general discussion, see Elkins, Slavery, *passim*; Earl Thorpe, "Chattel Slavery and Concentration Camps," Negro History Bulletin, 25 (1962), 171-174; and, Eugene Genovese, "Rebelliousness and Docility in the Negro Slave: A Critique of the Elkins Thesis," Civil War History, 13 (1967), 293-314.

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The concept of slave resistance being carried on and really characterized by small measures distinguished from rebellion, but still determined to produce more liberty, is discussed in detail in chs. 4 and 5; also, see Raymond A. Bauer and Alice H. Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," Journal of Negro History, 27 (1942), 388-419.



resistance. As a consequence, authorities limited the opportunities of slaves to gather force. "[G]uns, swords, clubs, staves, or any other kind of weapon" were illegal possessions for slaves. Not more than three slaves were allowed to meet together. Nor were slaves allowed outside after sunset unless accompanied by the owner. But control was not a simple matter: the very character of the City frustrated attempts by whites to restrict the chances of slaves to do damage.<sup>1</sup>

Despite all laws and precautions, slaves came together. Their chores brought them into continual contact with one another. During the day they met on the streets, at the markets, at the wells, on the docks and in ships. Much of this contact could not be supervised. During working hours it might be visible, but after work, in the dark, meetings of blacks took on a sinister and menacing character, and chances increased that slaves would get out of hand.<sup>2</sup>

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Col. Laws N.Y., I, 158, 519-520; II, 310, 679; V, 584; M.C.C., I, 133-134; III, 296; IV, 88-89, 497. On assessment of probability of insurrection in the City see McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York, 122; for a description of a similar situation created by urban environments, see Richard Wade, Slavery in the Cities (New York, 1964), 143-160.

## 2

M.C.C., III, 277-278; IV, 85. Olson, "The Slave Code in Colonial New York;" Goebel and Naughton, Law Enforcement in Colonial New York, 100; Carl Bridenbaugh, Cities in the Wilderness: Urban Life in America, 1625-1742 (New York, 1938), 68-71, 220-224, 379-384.

And they did. They talked, drank, gambled, amused themselves and gained strength from one another. They not only violated the letter and spirit of the laws but attacked society itself, for their misdemeanors gave way to felonies. In crowded "public houses" of the dock area, sailors and other "disorderly elements" exchanged views of the world with slaves. They brought news of wars, insurrections, protests and defeats. They showed slaves a different philosophy and conception of life. They brought different attitudes toward the orderly society of constables and shopkeepers and merchants and government officials. They also brought noise and violence and items such as guns, knives, and liquor. Most of all, these lower class whites, begrudging the upper ranges of society, brought slaves a share in common bitterness which occasionally led to confederation in crime.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
On connections with transients and disorderly elements, see Peterson and Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality, 162-163, 318-319; Minutes of the Supreme Court of Judicature, 1673-1701, New York Historical Society, Collections, 45 (1912), 43, 113, 172.



4.

Crime abounded among slaves. Of course, they were not the only ones in New York City disturbing the peace, running away, stealing or assaulting persons, yet their transgressions were particularly noteworthy since they were under more control than anyone else. If they could not be controlled, who could be? Moreover, slaves were beastly and if they were not controlled, what would be the result? These questions reoccurred to the City's citizens throughout the colonial period in reaction to seemingly ceaseless misbehavior by slaves. The substance of slave mischief might be considered commonplace or of little consequence now, but the contemporary conscience of the City did not take it that way. Serious disorder occurred when slaves simply breached the peace.<sup>1</sup>

Breach of the peace covered a multitude of sins by slaves. The crux of the charge stemmed from the slaves' and the society's different senses of what was suitable behavior. Slaves received social roles to play and when they did not perform in those roles society was disturbed. But disturbance issued from unrealistic expectations, for society expected slaves to act in unaccustomed

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<sup>1</sup>  
See "An Act to Prevent the Conspiracy of Slaves," Col. Laws N.Y., I, 631; Jordan, White Over Black, 123, 399, 400; for similar processes of fear, although not in this time and place, see Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York, 1941), ch. 2, "Fear of Rebellion." In addition, see Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 463-468, and his "Racial Problems, Adjustments and Disturbance," in The South in the Building of the Nation (13 vols.; Richmond, Va., 1909-1913), IV, 236.

ways. This was particularly clear in regard to native Africans and other blacks recently enslaved in the City. The slaves were "rude," they got drunk, they used profanity. They were raucous and the society demanded sobriety.<sup>1</sup>

Sunday was the worst day in New York City for slave control. It was the day when slaves had most time to themselves, and what slaves did during that time frequently disturbed others. For example, in 1682 the General Court of Assizes noted that slaves met "in great numbers on Sundays and other unseasonable times, using and exercising several rude and unlawful sports and pasttimes to the dishonour of God." It was not a matter only of breaking the Sabbath but of disorder in a broader sense. It reflected a flagrant and upsetting disregard of the system. The City could not allow that, especially not on the most sacred day of the week, the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of the problem of slave socialization elsewhere, see Mullin, Flight and Rebellion, esp. ch. 2; and Blassingame, The Slave Community, esp. ch. 5. On general problems in New York, see Olson, "Negro Slavery in New York," 93-94; Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1702-1703, 32; and Daniel Parish's Transcripts of Materials on Slavery in the Public Record Office in London, in the New York Historical Society manuscript collection: see Transcripts (1695-1713), 3. For example of "disrespectfulness," see Olson, "The Slave Code in Colonial New York."

<sup>2</sup> "Proceedings of the General Court of Assizes, 1680-1682," in New York Historical Society, Collections, 44 (1912), 37; Col. Laws N.Y., I, 158. Also note that Governor Fletcher's first recommendation to the Assembly in October 1692 was "that provision be made for the Support and Encouragement of an able Ministry and



Complaints prompted the City's Common Council to restrict slaves' Sunday activities. The first restriction came in 1686 but produced little comfort for the Council. So, in 1692 the Council decreed twenty lashes for any slave "playing or making any hooting or disorderly noise...or found in a public house." This was not successful either, and in 1700 the Council tried again to end the nuisance of frolicking slaves by reducing to three the number who could meet together. This, too, proved ineffective and complaints grew.<sup>1</sup>

But when slaves were not being boisterous sometimes they could not be found, for flight and truancy were serious problems of control. An almost endless stream of slaves ran away from New York City. Notices of fugitives regularly appeared in the advertisements of New York's newspapers when they began in the 1730s. Before then, owners complained to themselves or to each other or to legal authorities about slaves' escapes. Time after time they railed against slaves straying from home, shirking work or staying out

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for the Strict and due Observation of the Lord's day;" this was thrice repeated: see Journal of the Legislative Council of the Colony of New York, 1691-1775 (2 vols.; Albany, 1861), I, 25, 35, 39, 42.

<sup>1</sup>  
M.C.C., I, 134, 276; II, 102.

without permission. Whether describing slaves as simply "lazy" or "idle," owners clearly indicated that slaves often were not where they were supposed to be when they were supposed to be.<sup>1</sup>

Slave mothers absconded with their children as Mando did in 1701.<sup>2</sup> Men and women fled to be with a loved one sold away. They fled to be free for a day or a lifetime. They helped each other flee. For example, in August 1677 two slaves owned by Captain William Palmer came before the Mayor's Court, one on a charge of running away "from his master's Service by the Space of eight Dayes," the other for assisting the first by "giving him lodging and

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On image of truants and runaways, see Documents, "Eighteenth Century Slaves as Advertised by their Masters," Journal of Negro History, 1 (1916), 163-216; Lorenzo J. Greene, "The New England Negro as Seen in Advertisements for Runaway Slaves," ibid., 29 (19-4), 125-146; and Milton Cantor, "The Image of the Negro in Colonial Literature," New England Quarterly, 36 (1963), 452-477. The overwhelming bulk of evidence on runaways appeared in the newspaper advertisements: see New York Gazette and New York Weekly Post-Boy. On fugitive slaves throughout New York, see McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York, ch. 6. In this regard the pattern of "Troublesome Property" described for the antebellum South by Kenneth Stampp in The Peculiar Institution (New York, 1956), applied in New York City.

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Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, II, 289, 305.



Victualls." The first got "fifty lashes on Satterday next," and the second stood "at ye whipping post naked to ye waist with Rodds under his armes."<sup>1</sup>

Indians, particularly the Minisinks on eastern Long Island, also helped fugitive slaves. Moreover, the unsettled area surrounding the city during the early eighteenth century provided the wherewithall to maintain maroon bands. One such band became so menacing by 1702 that Governor Edward Cornbury ordered local authorities to "fire on them [and] kill or destroy them if they cannot otherwise be taken."<sup>2</sup>

Outside and inside the City whites helped slaves dodge the law. Farmers often traded the labor fugitives offered for shelter or provisions.<sup>3</sup> Induced either by bribes or by comradeship,

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Mayor's Court of the City of New York, 16 August 1677.

<sup>2</sup> See "Proclamation to Justices of Peace," made in July 1706 by Governor Cornbury: Stephen M. Ostrander, A History of the City of Brooklyn, and Kings County (2 vols.; Brooklyn, 1894), I, 171-172; also partially quoted in Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, 72. On slave receiving assistance, see Col. Laws N.Y., I, 157-159, 519-521, 582; and Kenneth W. Porter, "Relations between Negroes and Indians," Journal of Negro History, 17 (1932), esp. 308. Also, see the Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden, 1711-1775, VII, 29-31. On Dutch problems with runaways see ch. 2, and N.Y. Col. Docs., II, 82.

<sup>3</sup> See "A Bill against Fugitive Servants and the Entayners of Them," Col. Laws N.Y., I, 144-148.

sailors helped slaves stow away. Money bought help from others, too. A notorious number of persons in the City sold slaves temporary shelter or safety or "refreshment." The comprehensive "Act for Regulating Slaves" passed in 1702 tried unsuccessfully to curtail the practice.<sup>1</sup> But abetting slaves was too lucrative.

Fugitives and truants frequently financed escape and entertainment with theft. When successful, flight was a one-time occurrence and the amount slaves stole for the purpose reflected that. They ran off with as much as they could carry, dressed in the best clothes at hand, jingling money from the house cache and, at times, even aboard a commandeered horse. Yet, the theft associated with flight was less serious than that associated with truancy which produced regularized and prolonged theft on which an underworld of crime thrived.

Black markets converted stolen goods into currency for slaves and profits for those who fenced or received the merchandise. It was a tempting traffic which owners, legislators and constables could not stop. Slaves sold loot for so little, comparatively, that persons in almost every range of society willingly risked penalties--

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Laws N.Y., I, 519-521. On situation of flight through the harbor, see Peterson and Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality, 112-113; and McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York, 105-106; M.C.C., I, 85-86.



such as forfeiting £5 plus three-times the value of the stolen goods they might be found with--for the chance to make large profits.<sup>1</sup>

Slaves stole not only for exchange but for comfort. More food, clothing and petty objects made the circumstance of bondage more bearable for the moment. Owners seemingly took for granted a level of stealing by slaves and often presumed pilfering as the cause of the loss of articles, so much so that pilfering was everywhere part of the slave stereotype.<sup>2</sup>

Slaves caused the loss of owners' goods in another way--through destruction by fire. Arson by slaves in New York City occurred particularly as revenge for punishment. And since the City was built like a tinder box, all wooden and relatively close together, fire was a major threat. Owners were unable to check attempts at incendiarism and some slaves tried the tactic more than once, at times exhausting the patience of one owner and testing that

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Col. Laws N.Y., I, 157-158, 159, 519-520, 761; Minutes of the Supreme Court of Judicature, 192; M.C.C., IV, 497. For similar situations elsewhere, see Wade, Slavery in the Cities, 151-155.

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See Stampp, The Peculiar Institution, 125-127; Elkins, Slavery, 82-86; Genovese, "Rebelliousness and Docility," 308-312; Cantor, "The Image of the Negro in Colonial Literature," 452-477.

of the next who bought them. Generally, however, the slave who got a second chance had failed the first time. Successful slave arsonists usually met swift public reaction. For instance, the day after Jan Nagel's barn burned in 1684, destroying twelve cattle, a slave suspected of starting the fire was found "hanging to a tree at the little hill by the commons."<sup>1</sup>

Still, arson only indirectly attacked the system. It avoided the ultimate face to face confrontation between enslaved and enslaver. Bodily assaults did not. Murder and lesser attacks were direct and most worrisome to whites.

The records before 1710 show few assaults and none that were spectacular or bizarre. One noteworthy incident occurred in 1696 when Mayor William Merritt was "assaulted on the face" while trying to disperse a group of "noisy Negroes."<sup>2</sup> That assault occurred on the evening of 27 August. The next day, in punishment of the culprits, the Court of General Sessions ordered the

Negro man slave Called Prince be by the publick  
Whipper forthwith Carryed to the publick whipping  
post of this City and then to be stripped Naked

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Quoted in Edwin Morgan, "Slavery in New York," Half Moon Series, 2 (1898), 9; also see discussion of arson by slaves in Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, ch. 6.

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N.Y. Col. Docs., I, 39; Col. Laws N.Y., I, 520; Roi Ottley and William J. Weatherby, The Negro in New York (New York, 1967), 22-23; Olson, "Negro Slavery in New York," 100.



from the middle upwards and then and there be tyed to the tale of a carte and being so stripped and tyed shall be drawn round this City within the fortifications till he Return to the said whipping post and at the Corner of every street shall received Eleaven lashes upon his body.<sup>1</sup>

Two other slaves, Joe and Fortune, shared the treatment but fewer lashes.

During 1697 a Negro murdered a white man and received the death sentence. He died before execution, however. But the authorities would not be outdone--they ordered punishment inflicted on his dead body.<sup>2</sup> When a slave couple killed a white family of seven on nearby Long Island during 1708 disquiet pervaded the City. The execution of the two culprits--the woman on the gallows, the man at the stake--became an exhibit.<sup>3</sup> Whites determined to make frightening examples of any blacks who dared assault whites lest it lead to the most violent of slave crimes, insurrection.

New York never officially defined insurrection. Yet the notion prevalent during colonial times resembled the description made in Texas much later, during 1858. "by 'insurrection of slaves'," stated the Texas statute, "is meant an assemblage of

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<sup>1</sup> General Sessions of the Peace, 28 August 1696, quoted in Stokes, Iconography of Manhattan, IV, 397.

<sup>2</sup> Van Laer, "Calendar of Council Minutes, 1668-1783," 119.

<sup>3</sup> Calendar of Council Minutes, 119; N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 39.

three or more, with arms, with intent to obtain their liberty by force."<sup>1</sup> On that scale the City witnessed several insurrections but none more serious in destruction wrought by slaves than the Uprising of 1712.

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<sup>1</sup> General Laws of the 7th Legislature of the State of Texas, 175, quoted in Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, 162. See "An Act to Prevent the Conspiracy of Slaves," Col. Laws N.Y., I, 631.



## IV

## THE UPRISING OF 1712

1.

Rapid growth severely strained New York City by 1712. After declining at the beginning of the century, the City's population had reached almost 6000 with a dramatic increase of 1000 persons since 1705. New districts emerged as the number of houses in the City went over 1000. The markets expanded, but demand exceeded the system of supply. Moreover, resources in the Province and the City were being drawn off into war--a war New York did not want and tried to avoid by declaring itself neutral for seven years. The fighting drained tax monies, interrupted commerce and excited fears among the citizens. The Iroquois and French threatened the northern frontier, but the City especially feared an attack from the sea like the French and Spanish assault on Charleston in 1706. Internal threats further menaced the City. It had trouble raising revenue even to collect its garbage. And its problems with regulation were worse. The sheriff and constables were at a loss to check crime in the expanded population.<sup>1</sup> The City thus reached 1712 suffering

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On population, see E.B. O'Callaghan (ed.), Documentary History of the State of New York (4 vols.; Albany, 1849-1851), I, 395-405, 697; and, a "List of the Inhabitants and Slaves in the

growth pains, the disquiet of war, the disruption of revenue and regulation. Its slaves shockingly compounded this.

Examples of slave unrest came to the City in short order from Virginia, the Carolinas and Maryland. In New York a chronic worry developed "as much as the Number of slaves in the City of New York...doth daily increase, and that they have been found oftentimes guilty of Confederating together."<sup>1</sup>

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City of New York;" E.B. O'Callaghan (ed.), Calendar of Historical Manuscripts in the Office of the Secretary of State (2 vols.; Albany, 1866), II, 407; Calendar of State Papers Colonial Series America and West Indies (42 vols.; London, 1860-1953), 1711-1712, No. 454, 301-302; E.B. O'Callaghan and B. Fernow (eds.), Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York (15 vols.; Albany, 1853-1887), V, 339. On physical expansion of City at this time, see Arthur Peterson and George Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality (New York, 1917), 1-199, esp., 61-63 on markets. On problems of the sheriff and watch, see Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York 1675-1776 (8 vols.; New York, 1905), I, 71-72, 90-92, 117, 153-154, 195-197, 205-206. On garbage and the "scavenger," see *ibid.*, II, 354, 359 and III, 12 (on salary). That reduction in salary could have been an act of discrimination, as a woman--the widow of the previous "scavenger"--then held the office.

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Colonial Laws of New York from 1664 to the Revolution (5 vols.; Albany, 1894), I, 519-520; Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York, 1941), 171-174; Boston Weekly News-Letter, 14 April 1712; William Morgan, Queen Anne's Canadian Expedition of 1711 (Kingston, 1928); Douglas Leach, The Northern Frontier, 1607-1763 (New York, 1966); Mary Booth, History of the City of New York (3 vols.; New York, 1880), I, 219-292. See, Patricia U. Bonomi, A Factious People (New York, 1971), ch. III, esp., 82-87; on paupers, see M.C.C., I, 167, 112, 194, 205-206, 212, 226, 233-234, and esp., II, 206, in addition to summary in Peterson and Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality, 185-190; M.C.C., II, 454-455, and Samuel McKee, Labor in Colonial New York (New York, 1935), *passim*. Also see Louis Ruchames, "The Sources of Racial Thought in Colonial America," Journal of Negro History (1967), 251-272. On palatinates, see I.N.P. Stokes, Iconography of Manhattan Island (6 vols.; New York, 1915-1928), IV, 469; Walter A. Knittle, Early Eighteenth Century Palatine Emigration (Philadelphia, 1937), ch. 1.



Slave after slave tested the system in New York City, searching for and finding liberties by subtle, stealthy means. Eluding controls proved easier for slaves than confrontation. It was no way to end enslavement. Yet it relieved some of the depressing restrictions of the status. And more, it whetted the appetite of blacks for fewer restrictions. Of course, not every crime by slaves was a conscious effort to undermine the social order, but the broken rules they left stimulated anxiety among whites by showing that society was failing to a large degree to govern slaves effectively. The society wanted conformity from slaves; what it got largely was misbehavior which exposed consequences of maintaining slavery. One clear consequence was problems with social control. Another was racial violence.

2.

The Uprising of 1712 began New Year's day (25 March) on the Old Style calendar. In a tavern that night, a group of slaves determined to strike against New York City in an effort of liberation and destruction. A well concealed plan developed during the next twelve days, until blood in the streets, at last, made the plot public. Confusion immediately covered the event and the subsequent investigation. As a result, essentially two stories of the Uprising have developed in history: one of what whites supposed slaves were about and another of what slaves gave an account of and actually did. Some reports agree with both stories.<sup>1</sup>

Loose talk initiated the plot. Amidst much drinking, a group mostly of enslaved Cormantines and Pawpaws spoke of violence against whites--of burning and killing. The slaves, several freshly arrived in the City, went farther toward conspiracy by

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See Kenneth Scott, "The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712," New York Historical Society Quarterly, 45 (1961), 43-74. For other secondary accounts, see: Joshua Coffin, An Account of Some of the Principal Slave Insurrections (New York, 1860), 10-11; Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York, 1941), 172; Julius Gosbel and Raymond Naughton, Law Enforcement in Colonial New York (New York, 1944), 118-119; Paul M. Hamlin and Charles E. Baker, Supreme Court of Judicature of the Province of New York, 1691-1704 (New York, 1959), III, 174; William Riddell, "The Slave in Early New York," Journal of Negro History, 13 (1928), esp., 70-74; Stokes, Iconography of Manhattan Island, IV, 474-478; and Harvey Wish, "American Slave Insurrections before 1861," Journal of Negro History, 22 (1937), esp., 308.



marking some victims in advance, taking oaths of secrecy and fidelity, ceremonially sucking blood from each other, invoking supernatural powers, and procuring a powder supposed to make their clothes magically bullet proof. (The magic may have worked: none who used the powder were subsequently killed or wounded by gun shots.) Over the next week-and-a-half, more slaves were recruited for the attack, as targets and tactics were detailed. Then, armed with muskets, pistols, swords, staves, hatchets, knives, clubs and axes, twenty to thirty slaves gathered together just after midnight on Sunday, April 6th.<sup>1</sup>

The scene was the East Ward. According to plan, two slaves set their master's outhouse on fire and deployed themselves with others to ambush anyone responding to the fire alarm. And neighbors close and far swarmed to Peter Vantilborough's that night to save their belongings, their families and themselves.<sup>2</sup>

In night gowns and with materials to fight fire and little else, the whites ran directly into the ambush. Eight white men from among some of the prominent families in the City met death.

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<sup>1</sup> See letter of John Sharpe to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel of Foreign Parts, 23 June 1712. The Reverend Sharpe was chaplain at Fort Anne, home of the Governor, Provincial Offices, and the Royal Garrison in New York City. This letter is published in the New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, 21 (1890), 162-163.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; on threat of fire in this time, see Arthur Peterson George Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality (New York, 1917), 169-181.

Adrian Beekman died of a pistol-shot in the heart. Henry Brasier, Jr., had his neck broken by an axe-blow. Augustus Grasset's throat was cut. Joris Marschalck was stabbed in the chest, as were William Echt and Adrian Hoglandt. John Corbett and Johannes Low died of multiple wounds. Lawrence Reade and David Coesart were critically wounded, but survived. Ten others, reported the Reverend John Sharpe (chaplain of the local English garrison), also were wounded, but not critically.<sup>1</sup>

A general alarm--from the fire, the fighting, and the whites fleeing the ambush--awakened the entire City. Governor Robert Hunter immediately dispatched troops to the scene and warned townspeople to arm themselves for danger by firing "the great cannon at the fort." The shot served notice to the slaves also: it ended the element of surprise. The slaves had not planned enough. They no longer were on the attack; the whites had taken over the offense. Rather than be overwhelmed by the troops and now alerted citizenry, the insurgents withdrew northward to the woods.<sup>2</sup>

Retreat, however, was neither orderly nor safe. Several insurgents chose suicide: one couple died together, the man serving the blow to his woman and, then, to himself. Some of the other slaves

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<sup>1</sup> Sharpe to the Society. Boston Weekly News-Letter, 14 April 1712. Notes of Inquisition by the Coroner of the City of New York, 9 April 1712, in manuscripts of the New York Historical Society Miscellaneous, IV, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Sharpe to the Society. Boston Weekly News-Letter, 14 April 1712.



scattered. Troops surrounded the area to cut-off further escape. The City's militia assembled, as did that of the neighboring northern county--Westchester, which then included what is now the Bronx--and the search began. Beating the countryside and scouring the woods, the whites seized nineteen slaves--six dead, apparent suicides.<sup>1</sup>

What the insurgent slaves fully intended to do in the uprising never was recorded. Recalcitrance was part of their action and, beyond that, retaliation. The terror, death and destruction they struck in the City seem the beginning elements of nihilism. But the action was all too brief, too limited in its scale, and too confined in its setting. First, the participants largely came from one neighborhood, near the edge of the East Ward. Second, the attack remained in the locality of the small neighborhood. Third, fire was not simultaneously set to many buildings, but to one--and that, curiously, an outhouse. Obviously, more serious destruction would have been done by burning a residence; fire more likely would have spread if started in a barn; and, decidedly, most damage would have been done by multiple fires, although suspicion of a plot might have been aroused more immediately. Fourth, the strategy of ambush

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Sharpe to Society; Boston Weekly News-Letter, 14 April 1712; Robert Hunter, Governor of Her Majesty's Province of New York, to the Lords of Trade, 23 June 1712, N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 341-342.

allowed for little enlargement of action: it reduced the possible area, number of combatants, and duration of attack. Fifth, nothing other than ambush appeared planned.

Interestingly, no slaves attacked their own masters. No expectation appeared to take over the City, to involve it wholly in rebellion, or to set it all on fire. The ending for the plan probably was clear to the plotters from the outset. Although they perhaps hoped for more, their expectations should not have far exceeded what they got. They began at the edge, not at the center of the City. They did not attempt to gain support from the greatest number of blacks, nor to kill the greatest number of whites, nor to do the greatest amount of damage.

The limits, however, did not cut the uprising off from success. Of course, if part of the plan was to escape from enslavement--except in death and for one black unaccounted for--it failed. Yet, at least partially, the plan succeeded: an attack did come off, it was kept secret, other slaves had joined in, and eight whites did die.



3.

The Uprising shocked New York City. The violence, reported one citizen in a notice dated April 7th, in the Boston Weekly News-Letter, "has put us into no small Consternation[,] the whole Town being under Arms." The excitement increased with notice of a brief rampage of seven Cormantine slaves on the West Indian island of Jamaica. The scale of action also enlarged: within six days the City could report "about 70 Negro's in Custody," Suspicions spread even further: "'t is fear'd that most of the Negro's here (who are very numerous)," wrote a concerned townsman, "knew of the Late Conspiracy to murder the Christians." With the suspicion and excitement, the notion spread that "had it not been for the Garrison... [the] City would have been reduced to ashes, and the greatest part of the inhabitants murdered."<sup>1</sup>

Immediately the machinery of prosecution went to work. A coroner's jury charged fourteen slaves with murder and named two dozen others as accomplices. The Court of Quarter Sessions of the Peace convened at City-Hall on April 11th, to hear formal indictments and to begin trial proceedings. The Supreme Court of Judicature--the highest court in the Province--took over the proceedings on

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<sup>1</sup>  
Boston Weekly News-Letter, 14 April 1712. Ibid., 21 April 1712; ibid., 28 April 1712.

June 3rd, when its regular term opened. All the trials were by jury, but the accused did not have the benefit of legal counsel.<sup>1</sup> How much difference lawyers would have made in the outcome is doubtful in the face of a relentless prosecution by the Attorney General, May Bickley, whom Governor Hunter described during the proceedings as "a busy waspish man."<sup>2</sup>

In all, forty-three slaves were indicted and--except for one who could not be found--brought to trial. Six of the slaves charged with murder by the coroner's jury were neither indicted or tried. Of these six, at least two--Dick and Cuffee--turned evidence for the Queen and, as Governor Hunter reported, "were made use of in all the trials of all the criminals before the Justices." The records show the Governor exaggerated: there were trials in which Dick and Cuffee were not used, yet clearly as Hunter stated, "without [their] testimonies very few could have been punished."<sup>3</sup>

Except for the trial of Peter the Doctor in October (and he was acquitted), the proceedings ended on June 7th. Thirty-nine

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Sharpe to the Society; Hunter to Lords of Trade, N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 341. On provisions for slave trials, see Col. Laws N.Y., I, 520.

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Ibid., also see, Coroner's Inquisition, New York Historical Society; Court of Quarter Sessions of the County and City of New York, Minutes, 1705-1714, in County Clerk's Office, 39-40, 48-50; the Supreme Court of Judicature, Minute Books, 1704-1825, 36 vols., County Clerk's Office, The City of New York, Book II (6 June 1710 - 5 June 1714), 383-385, 393, 399-400, 417, 427, 420. Boston Weekly News-Letter, 14 April 1712, 21 April 1712.

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Hunter to Lords of Trade, N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 342.



slaves had been indicted as murderers or as accessories. The four others indicted were charged with assault with intent to kill. Of the forty-three, seventeen had been acquitted and twenty-five had been sentenced to death. Twenty were sentenced to hang, but reprieves saved six until they received royal pardons. Two burned at the stake. Another burned for eight to ten hours by slow fire. One black was broken at the wheel. The other slave sentenced to death was hanged in chains to starve--a slow execution, for he was still alive and talking after three days.<sup>1</sup>

Attorney General Bickley had meant to have "an eye for an eye." The blood of whites had been shed, and he intended to see the blood of blacks shed. Bickley's determination showed dramatically in the prosecution of Mars, owned by Jacob Regnier (a personal enemy of the Attorney General). Three times Mars went to trial--once in a clear case of double jeopardy. On April 12th, Mars was acquitted of the murder of Adrian Beekman, although two co-defendants were convicted. Bickley insisted, however, on trying Mars again. On April 22nd, Mars again was acquitted of Beekman's murder. Still determined, Bickley changed the indictment and, finally, on June 4th, along with two other blacks, Mars was convicted of the murder of Henry Brasier and sentenced to hang.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter to Lords of Trade, N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 341-342; Sharpe to the Society; Boston Weekly News-Letter, 21 April 1712.

<sup>2</sup> Court of Quarter Sessions, Minutes, 39-40, 48-50; Supreme Court of Judicature, Minute Book II, 393, 417, 327, 429; Hunter to

Governor Hunter was not so inclined to vengeance and, indeed, viewed the proceedings differently from the Attorney General. In fact, Bickley and Hunter clashed head-on in the handling of the prosecution. The Governor thought the number of executions exceeded necessity: "a few only," he wrote, would have sufficed "for an example."<sup>1</sup> Further Hunter felt "more have suffered than we can find were active in this bloody affair." The Governor intended to save those he could, first by reprieves and, then, by forwarding to the Privy Council a list of slaves with "reasons for reprieving" them and a request that "if your Lordships think them of sufficient weight, I beg you will procure Her Majesty's pleasure to be signified to me for this pardon."<sup>2</sup> This conduct so urked Bickley that he actually circulated a petition to discredit the Governor. In the end, however, the Privy Council backed Hunter and secured the requested pardons.<sup>3</sup>

Within the City the Attorney General's position found many in sympathy. Faced with the brutal fact of the outbreak and with

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Lords of Trade, 23 June 1712, N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 341-342; also, Hunter to Lords of Trade, 14 March 1712, ibid., 356-357; Scott, "The Slave Insurrection in New York," 58-59.

<sup>1</sup> Hunter to the Lords of Trade, N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 341-342.

<sup>2</sup> N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 341-342.

<sup>3</sup> Acts of the Privy Council of England, Colonial Series (Hereford, 1910), II, 666.



the possibility of something like it happening again, the citizens of New York demanded stricter controls on slaves. Also citizens became hostile to persons meddling with slaves. For example, attacks on Elias Neau, who conducted a school for Negroes at Trinity Church, came in the aftermath of the Uprising, for his catechesis aimed to convert blacks to Christianity. It was an old controversy renewed. "This barbarous Conspiracy of the Negroes w[hich] was first thought to be general," wrote the Reverend John Sharpe to the Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, "opened the mouths of many Ag[ains]t Negroes being made Christians."<sup>1</sup> With two strikes on him--one from persons against conversion of blacks and another from those against giving any instruction to slaves--Neau served as a scapegoat. And he suffered more than simple ill will; for a time he was in physical danger. "Mr. Neau," wrote Reverend Sharpe, "durst hardly appear; his School was blamed as the main Occasion for it [the Uprising] and a Petition had like to have been presented if the Governr had not Stood his Cause."<sup>2</sup>

Records show, however, only two among the insurgent slaves had attended Neau's catechism class, and only one of the pair was baptized. On reflection, most of the citizens realized that little

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<sup>1</sup>  
Sharpe to Society.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid.

actual connection could be made between the catechist and the conspirators. As the Reverend Sharpe reported,

The cry ag[ains]t Catechising ye Negroes continued till upon Conviction they were found to be such as never frequented Mr. Neau's school, and what is very observable[,] the Persons whose Negroes have been found guilty are such as are declared opposers of Christianizing Negroes.<sup>1</sup>

Neau seized the point, not only for defense, but also to further his cause by suggesting that conversion and proper instruction made Negroes better slaves.<sup>2</sup>

In response to demand for stricter control, the Common Council prepared a "Law for Regulating Negro and Indian slaves in the night Time." Passed finally on 3 March 1713, the law provided stiffer curfew regulations on slaves: none fourteen years or older were allowed on New York City streets an hour after sunset, unless with a lantern or candle by which to be plainly seen. Anyone seeing a slave not adhering to the regulations was authorized to arrest the slave. To induce masters to be more watchful, a fine of eight shillings and whatever jail or court costs involved, were levied

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Sharpe to Society.

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Sharpe to Society. Jordan, White Over Black, 122-135; Ruchames, "The Sources of Racial Thought in Colonial America," esp., 254-261. Col. Laws N.Y., I, 761; M.C.C., III, 27-31.



on the masters of slaves caught violating the statute. Also, the slave got thirty-nine lashes at the public whipping post.<sup>1</sup>

The Provincial Assembly's response to the Uprising was "An Act for Preventing, Suppressing, and Punishing the Conspiracy and Insurrection of Negroes, and other Slaves."<sup>2</sup> Mostly the new law reiterated earlier instructions to police and, when necessary, punish slaves. Reflecting, as the Common Council had, the fact that owners played a crucial part in policing slaves, the Provincial Assembly reacknowledged the owner's power, in all and any case, to punish slaves in ways short of taking life or limb. At the same time, the law insisted on the responsibility of owners to account for slaves at all times, and to answer personally for slaves' misbehavior. The law notified not only owners, but everyone, of the duty to police slaves, and provided fines for anyone who saw but did not report slave mischief. Further, the law stiffened penalties for anyone abetting slave misbehavior. For example, not only were persons "entertaining" slaves liable to the law, "any person...knowing of such Entertainer of any Slave...and do[es] not discover the same to the master...or to some one Justice of the Peace...shall forfeit the Sum of Two Pounds." The "entertainer,"

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M.C.C., I, 27-31.

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Col. Laws N.Y., I, 761. Also see Journal of the Legislative Council of the Colony of New York, 1691-1765 (2 vols.; Albany, 1866), I, 347; Col. Laws N.Y., I, 157, 519, 597-598, 631, 761.

or other person "harbouring...concealing, [and] assisting" a mischievous slave was "liable to pay the value of such slave."<sup>1</sup>

To mete out punishment publicly there was "a common Whipper... at any City or Town and Mannors." To prescribe public punishment the law allowed slaves jury trials (although without the right to peremptory challenge of jurors), if their owner agreed to "pay the Charge of the Same." Justices of the Peace, "In conjunction with five of the principal freeholders of the County," decided punishment for slaves when jury trials were not employed. Private punishment, of course, fell to owners.<sup>2</sup>

The New York slave code relied heavily on the deterrent affects of exemplary punishment. Punishment, however, was ex post facto and of little comfort to the victims of slave crime. Prevention was preferred. Thus, attention focused on keeping slaves from acting in groups or having access to weapons. It was "not lawfull for any...Slave to have or use any Gun or Pistol but in his Master's or Mistresses' presence or by their direction." Nor were more than three slaves to meet at any time without permission of owners or authorities. As for individual actions, the law hoped to discourage slaves by fear of punishment. For instance,

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<sup>1</sup>  
Col. Laws N.Y., I, 761-762.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., I, 761ff.



"in Case any Slave shall...assault or strike any Freeman or Woman, professing Christianity," the law prescribed "corporal punishment (not extending to life or limb)." "[T]he pains of Death in such manner and with such circumstances as...they shall merit and require" was the final penalty applied to slaves for murder, rape, and arson.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to clamping down on slaves, the Provincial Assembly touched the subject of freedmen. Suspicion had fallen on the connection of free Negroes with the Uprising, but even before that they were little welcomed in the City. Theirs was an odd position. Almost without advantages of content and possession, free blacks were allowed little by the society. Frequently left without means of support and without employment, they were often worse off than slaves.

A case that occurred in 1671 showed the vagaries to which free Negroes in New York City were subject. Manuel Angola and Domingo, two free Negroes were informed by the Mayor's Court, "that divers complaints were made that the free negroes were from time to time entertaining sundry of the servants and negroes belonging to the Burghers and inhabitants to the great damage of their owners." As a consequence, the two were ordered thenceforth "not to entertain... any servants or helps, whether Christian or negroes on pain of

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<sup>1</sup>Col. Laws N.Y., I, 761.

forfeiting their freedom in case it was again found, that they have harboured any servants or helps of others longer than 24 hours." The penalty for whites committing such an offense was only fine of a few pounds. Further, Domingo and Manuel "were likewise ordered to communicate [this] to other remaining free negroes."<sup>1</sup>

The Assembly further deprived the freedmen's status by declaring that "no Negro, Indian or Mullatto that shall hereafter be made free shall...possess any Houses, Lands, Tenements, or Hereditaments." Simultaneously the law increased the difficulties of "hereafter be[ing] made free" by requiring any owner "setting at Liberty any Slaves" to produce "two sureties not less than the Sum of Two hundred pounds." In 1717 a law somewhat relaxed the restriction on manumission by allowing sureties to be received from any person, not only the owner. Nevertheless, manumission remained restricted. Now, not only had lack of privilege permeated the slave status, it continued beyond formal enslavement and, in a sense, began to close off the possibilities of liberty after slavery.<sup>2</sup>

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Berthold Fernow (ed.), The Records of New Amsterdam, 1653-1674 (7 vols.; New York, 1897), VI, 286.

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Journal of the Legislative Council, 347; Col. Laws N.Y., 761; Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, 173; on free Negroes, see Jordan, White Over Black, 108, 123, 124-128, 134; for sketchy view of the free Negro in New York see, McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York, 11-12, 18, 162-165.



The Uprising was a point on a line of visible resistance by slaves. New Yorkers wanted, therefore, not only to punish slaves at the point of violence, but to protect themselves against the progression of slave misbehavior. Retaliation accomplished one end. Regulation tried for another. Yet some citizens felt more was necessary: to remove the problems with slaves, these persons called for the removal of slaves.

Governor Hunter expressed the point of view in a message to the Assembly. "The Late Hellish Attempt of your Slaves," he wrote, "is sufficient to Convince you of the necessity of putting that Sort of men under better Regulation by Some good Law for the purpose." Further, the Governor urged the Assembly to "take away the Root of the Evil [and] Encourage the Importation of white Servants." The New York assembly did not act on the suggestion, but other colonies understood the message and, within the year, for example, Pennsylvania prohibited further importation of slaves and Massachusetts levied a duty tending to hinder importation of slaves.<sup>1</sup>

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Alexander C. Flick (ed.), History of the State of New York (10 vols.; New York, 1933-1937), II, 408; A. Judd Northrup, "Slavery in New York, A Historical Sketch," New York State Library Bulletin, History, No. 4 (1900), 290; C.B. Keith, Chronicles of Pennsylvania from the English Revolution to the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, 1688-1748 (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1917), II, 505; Lorenzo J. Greene, The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776 (New York, 1942), 76; Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, 173. On question of encouraging immigration as a general problem, see Erna Risch, "Encouragement of Immigration as Revealed in Colonial Legislation," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 45 (1937), 1-10.

## V

## THE CONSPIRACY OF 1741

1.

The external circumstances of New York in 1741 much resembled those in 1712--war, political rivalry, economic downturn, and strains from municipal expansion. Passing time also brought new trials. Adversities so disrupted New York in 1740 and early 1741 that lieutenant governor George Clarke proclaimed "a day of public fast and humiliation," according to one contemporary, because "the calamities with which we had of late been visited."<sup>1</sup>

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New York Weekly Journal, 20 April, 20 May 1741. The most complete primary source of the conspiracy is a compilation of records from the trials of the alleged conspirators. The compilation was made by one of the trial judges, Daniel Horsmanden, esq. He was third justice on the Supreme Court of Judicature in New York and rendered many of the sentences of execution. (For details on Horsmanden, see Charles W. Spencer's entry on him in the Dictionary of American Biography [22 vols.; New York, 1928-1944], IX, 236-237, and Mary P. McManus, "Daniel Horsmanden, Eighteenth Century New Yorker," Ph.d. dissertation, Fordham University, 1960.) With an introduction, conclusion, and a running commentary, the compilation was published originally at New York during 1744. It was reissued at London in 1747. A second edition--the one used in this chapter--appeared in 1810, entitled: The New-York Conspiracy or a History of the Negro Plot, with the Journal of the Proceedings against the Conspirators at New-York in the Years 1741-2. Together with Several Interesting Tables. A partial edition appeared later in the century. The most recent edition was published in 1971 by Beacon Press, entitled Daniel Horsmanden, The New York Conspiracy, edited with an introduction



Those calamities included the coldest and most severe winter in living memory which, through extensive losses of livestock and crops, created ruinous food shortages in the City as well as the Province. In addition, economic pressures still lingered from the bad times of 1737, and both money and work were scarce--the latter, for some white craftsmen, due to competition from slave labor. Moreover, the War of Jenkins' Ear which trailed into King George's War--putting the major European powers in battle almost around the world--drained men and money from New York, interrupted its commerce, and excited fears usual to a vulnerable coastal town in a frontier province: fears of betrayal from within and invasion from without.<sup>1</sup>

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by Thomas J. Davis. Undoubtedly Horsmanden had biases which obtrude in the text; to indicate when Horsmanden admitted he was offering his interpretation as opposed to where he asserts to be reproducing the notes here give the section of the book being cited--i.e., preface, introduction, journal of the proceedings, and conclusion. On "calamities" see New York Conspiracy, 69.

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See Patricia Bonomi, A Fictitious People (New York, 1971), esp., ch. IV; Douglas Leach, The Northern Colonial Frontier (New York, 1966), 103-106; Richard Pares, "American Versus Continental Warfare, 1739-1763," English Historical Review, 50 (1936), 429-465, and his War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763 (Oxford, 1939); New York Conspiracy, 69. New York's fear concerning the war and its frontier position is readily seen in the comments from December 1740 onward in the New York Gazette and the New York Weekly Journal; also, see E.B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow, (eds.), Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York (15 vols.; Albany, 1856-1887), VI, 162; and, Arnold Van Laer (ed.), "Calendar of Council Minutes, 1668-1783," New York State Library, Bulletin, No. 58 (Albany, 1902), 335. For threat of slaves as a fifth column, see Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York, 1943), esp., 19-20.

War served some in the City as an explanation of the source of a slave conspiracy. On one hand, the war weakened the garrison in the City by calling for armed expeditions to the West Indies; on another hand it introduced suspicious individuals and ideas into the City.<sup>1</sup>

Particularly suspicious to the citizens was a group of recently enslaved Spanish speaking blacks. From the beginning these "Spanish negroes," were outspoken and recalcitrant. In time they impressed the "York negroes" as fighters and suggested that other Spaniards might soon attack the City, especially if the blacks rose up. General James Oglethorpe, governor of Georgia, contributed to that last notion in a letter to lieutenant governor Clarke. Oglethorpe warned that, through a prisoner taken during a recent expedition against the Spanish in Florida, he discovered that spies had been sent throughout British North America to burn the principal magazines and forts. Perhaps some New Yorkers thought, the "Spanish negroes" were in contact with such spies already in the City.<sup>2</sup>

The hue and cry in April 1741 became "conspiracy" as word passed throughout the City that the more than 2,000 slaves, and some

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<sup>1</sup> On suspicions, see New York Conspiracy, "Introduction."

<sup>2</sup> On Spanish Negroes, see Charles Hough (ed.), Reports of Cases in the Vice Admiralty of the Province of New York and the Court of Admiralty of the State of New York, 1715-1780 (New Haven, 1925), 17; New York Conspiracy, esp., 117-118, 138-139, 172-187. For Oglethorpe to Clarke, 16 May 1741, see ibid., 350-351.



other persons, had plotted to burn down New York and murder most of its 9,000 white inhabitants. That triggered private and public investigation in the City to determine whether such a plot existed. The process of that investigation and the facts it uncovered immediately became controversial and have remained so ever since, for conspiracies often are difficult to prove. As the word "conspiracy" suggests, those charged with it stand accused of planning secretly. Hence most of the weight of accusation hangs on indirect evidence and implication--guilt by association. Evidence, even when sufficient by legal standards to produce conviction, almost invariably leaves room for reasonable doubt.<sup>1</sup>

Many New Yorkers in 1741 had doubts about the action. To some it seemed horribly silly and almost absurd that slaves, even with help, could have created or succeeded in such a scheme as suggested by the conspiracy. Nevertheless, the scheme was taken very seriously in Court and by many citizens; as a result, thirteen blacks were burned at the stake, sixteen were hanged along with four whites, and seventy-one were banished from New York.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On population, see censuses of 1737 and 1746; E.B. O'Callaghan (ed.), Documentary History of the State of New York (4 vols.; Albany, 1849-1851), I, 694f. For situation of slaves and the City, see David Grim's manuscript notes of his recollection done in 1813 of the "Negro Plot," in package "1739-1747," New York Historical Society Manuscripts listed as "New York, 1700-1760." In reference to discussion of law and conspiracy, see Herbert Packer, "The Conspiracy Weapon," New York Review of Books, 13 (6 Nov. 1969), 24-30.

<sup>2</sup> On contemporaries response to conspiracy, see Horsmanden, "Introduction," 28 and "Journal of Proceedings," 130-140. Letters

These executions and the episode itself have been written off as an example of mass hysteria. Admittedly, many whites in the City acted with emotional excitement and anxiousness. Indeed, the prosecution seemed somewhat paranoid. Nevertheless, description of the whole episode as entirely an example of hysteria overshadows details and developments which reflect the nature of black protest to enslavement--a fact that did not miss the eyes of New Yorkers in 1741.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporaries had answers to the question whether a conspiracy existed in truth, but historians generally have not seen the significance of those answers. Conspiracy existed. The facts left no doubt about that. Uncertainty centered on what the conspiracy was in fact, for there were several conspiracies: different persons saw different ones. During the trial proceedings, the prosecution

and Papers of Cadwallader Colden, 1711-1767, in the New York Historical Society, Collections, 50-56, 67-68 (New York, 1918-1923, 1934-1935), Vol. 67, 265-266, 270-272 (...), and 289-299; the Boston Weekly News-Letter, 7-14 May, 18-25 June, issues for July, 6-13 August and 3-10 September, 1741; N.Y. Col. Docs., VI, 186-187, 196-202, 213; VII, 528. On executions, see "A List of Negroes..." in Appendix, New York Conspiracy, 466-474.

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Horsmanden, "Introduction," 11-12, also "Preface to Second Edition," The New York Conspiracy.



constructed one grandiose conspiracy from a number of elements that did exist and which were connected.<sup>1</sup>

"What we saw with our eyes, and heard with our ears," as one contemporary put it, suggested that

the people in general, might be persuaded of the necessity there is, for every one that has negroes, to keep a watchful eye over them, and not to indulge them with too great liberties, which we find they make use of to the worst purposes, caballing and confederating together in mischief....<sup>2</sup>

This "mischief" was a center of attention. Most New Yorkers tended to agree that blacks were naturally annoying and vexing. Several observers in the months from April to August 1741 suggested that the behavior of blacks had gone beyond that point. No longer did slave

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For historiography, see Annette Dorf, "The Slave Conspiracy of 1741," (Master's Essay, Columbia University, 1958); T. Wood Clarke, "The Negro Plot of 1741," New York History, 22 (1944), 166-181; Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, 193; Edgar McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York (Syracuse, 1966), 124-139; Ulrich B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery (New York, 1918), 469-471; Walter Prince, "New York 'Negro Plot' of 1741," Saturday Chronicle [New Haven, Conn.] 28 June and 23 August 1902, a typescript of which is at the New York Public Library; Henry Ingersoll, "The New York Plot of 1741," The Green Bag, 20 (1908); Franc M. Szasz, "The New York Slave Revolt of 1741: A Re-Examination," New York History, 48 (1967), 215-230.

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Horsmanden, "Preface," 11.

misbehavior only try the patience of whites; evidence of its danger was everywhere.<sup>1</sup>

To begin with, a suspicious rash of ten fires--eight of which occurred within six days--had ruined or threatened parts of the City. The first of the fires was the worst: supposedly it began on the roof of the governor's house and spread from there to consume, in approximately an hour and a quarter, much of Fort George, the official seat of royal government in the Province. Violent winds whipped the blaze, blowing sparks onto the shingles of houses outside the fort, endangering them, and threatening to burn down the town.<sup>2</sup> But, although the fort continued to burn all night, a rain shower in the late afternoon cooled the blaze and saved the town from more destruction.<sup>2</sup>

A week later fire struck another section of town but did little damage. A week after that, Winant Van Zant's storehouse burned down. Three days later, two fires broke out, and the next

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<sup>1</sup> Horsmanden, "Journal of Proceedings," passim., esp., 89-100. Compare attitudes expressed with general temper described in Louis Ruchames, "The Sources of Racial Thought in Colonial America," Journal of Negro History, 52 (1967), 251-252; and, Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black (Chapel Hill, 1968), esp., Part Two, "Provincial Decades, 1700-1755."

<sup>2</sup> Horsmanden, "Introduction," 25-29.



morning Joseph Murray's stable burned partially. The same day-- Sunday, April 5th--a white woman overheard Quaco, a black slave, say "Fire, Fire, Scorch, Scorch, a little, damn it, by-and-by."<sup>1</sup> The following day there were four blazes in the City.

Although no proof of arson existed, particularly the last four fires aroused suspicion. Quaco's epithet incited distrust of blacks as the culprits. That distrust deepened with the fire at Frederick Philipse's storehouse. A number of persons saw the slave Cuffee at the site before the fire and fleeing the scene afterward. John Peterson testified later that he "met Cuffee coming out of the door of the storehouse."<sup>2</sup> Jacobus Stoudenburgh, who was on the roof of the storehouse, testified that

there being a great many shingles pulled off the roof, he could see down into them, and espied out Cuff in the storehouse next to that on fire, and he was letting himself down through the laths in order to catch him, but he was hindered by a nail catching throughout hold of his breeches.<sup>3</sup>

While Stoudenburgh was taking care not to tear his pants, Cuffee "made very good speed home to his master's," according to one

<sup>1</sup> Horsmanden, "Introduction," 28-31. On problems created by fire, see "An Act for the better Extinguishing fires that may happen in the City of New York," Colonial Laws of New York from 1664 to Revolution (5 vols.; Albany, 1894), II, 1064-1067; also check "Sketch of the Origin of the Fire Department of the City of New York, as at Present Organized," in David Valentine, Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York (New York, 1856), 521-529.

<sup>2</sup> "Journal of Proceedings," 85.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

report, "making it over several garden fences in great haste." He was pursued and apprehended, however, and "several negroes... who were met in the streets...were hurried away to jail."<sup>1</sup>

"[I]n a few days," as tensions somewhat subsided, "those [Negroes] against whom nothing in particular was alleged, were discharged."<sup>2</sup> That did little to settle the agitation. Not only had the fires been alarming, they had provided occasion for numerous thefts. It was usual when there was a fire in the City for those residents in the threatened section to remove their household goods for safekeeping. Many New Yorkers had done so during the rash of fires. To their dismay, they often lost little to flames and a lot to thieves. Again, blacks were suspected along with "strangers."<sup>3</sup>

With the militia standing guard throughout the City by orders of the lieutenant governor, the aldermen and assistants, accompanied by constables, conducted "a general search of all houses throughout the town." They looked "not only of stolen goods, but likewise of lodgers, that were strangers, and suspicious persons."<sup>4</sup> Little was discovered, but Robin and his wife Cuba were jailed for possessions

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<sup>1</sup> "Journal of Proceedings," 85; "Introduction," 26-29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



of "some things...which the aldermen thought improper for, and unbecoming the condition of slaves, which...[probably] they were not come honestly by."<sup>1</sup> No evidence of crime existed however.

Most of the suggestions that blacks were connected with the fires and robberies began only as suspicion. While Cuffee was found at, and fled from, the scene of the fire at Philipse's storehouse, no one saw him actually set the fire. Nor was there flagrant evidence in the other cases. Quack--against the specific orders of the lieutenant governor--had been at the fort the morning it burned, but what did that prove? Also, after Captain Sarly's Negro, Juan, had made some threats, the houses of Agnes Hilton and Ben Thomas--one on the east side of Sarly's, the other on the west--burned.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, there still was no proof of the source of the fires.

In time, evidence from another source provided some proof. There was little doubt that Caesar was involved in a robbery at Robert Hoggs' shop. He was found with the goods, as were Prince, John and Sarah Hughson, and a woman called Peggy. An investigation of the relations among these persons and their connections with

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 33.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 28, "Journal of Proceedings," 90.

the robbery at Hoggs' provided many New Yorkers with concrete evidence of serious danger from blacks.<sup>1</sup>

Not everything that went on between Caesar, Prince, and the Hughsons was uncovered during their trials, yet several things were established irrefutably. Caesar and Prince, along with twenty to thirty other blacks, had frequented Hughson's alehouse and had been entertained and served liquor there. Patently, that violated several laws. On a couple of occasions, constables had broken up such gatherings at Hughson's.<sup>2</sup>

He was not the only person "keeping," as the Judges called it, "a disorderly house." In the wake of his trial, ten keepers of public houses throughout the City were arraigned for entertaining slaves and serving them liquor in violation of law. In these cases the heaviest sentence handed down was a fine of £8 and imprisonment until the fine was paid; the lightest was a fine of 6p and immediate discharge.

These were no major crimes. Sneaking liquor and entertainment to slaves was often winked at as petty. What disturbed the authorities was the increasing dimension and frequency of offenses.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 39-46, 69-74, esp., 89-93; "Introduction," 15-22.

<sup>2</sup> "Journal of Proceedings," 80, 114-115, 117; for a quick review of laws applying, see Col. Laws N.Y., II, 679; also, Edwin Olson, "The Slave Code in Colonial New York," Journal of Negro History, 29 (1944), 147-165. On trials and sentences for "keeping disorderly houses," see "Journal of Proceedings," 280-281.



More was involved than a drink or diversion for slaves: not only had blacks illegally frequented the "disorderly houses," the circumstances of those visits implied a series of other illegal actions. Slaves had assembled in other places, at various times, travelled without permission, consorted with white prostitutes and criminals, engaged widely in theft and, on occasion, in arson. The authorities were of the opinion that if such "mischief" continued unchecked as it had, New York City would be in a shambles like the recently burned fort.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, Col. Laws N.Y., II, 679-688; Horsmanden, "Preface," 11-12, and "Conclusion," esp., 372.

2.

Not the immediate impact of each act of mischief excited concern, it was together that the acts of misbehavior displayed the tendency of blacks to work for expanded liberties. And expanded liberties for slaves had dangerous implications for the society. Restraint and regulation were necessary parts of the system of slavery, as they were weakened the system was weakened. To the authorities that meant society was exposed to extreme danger. Blacks at liberty were likely to cause injury. As Justice Daniel Horsmanden wrote, "indulge them with too great liberties...[and] we find they make use of [it] to the worst purposes."<sup>1</sup> John Smith agreed, "we shall not be quite safe," he said, "till that wicked race are under more restraint, or their number greatly reduced within this city."<sup>2</sup>

To New Yorkers of similar opinion, the disposition and number of blacks in the City suggested that slaves could not be allowed to continue to slip from complete domination. "[T]his city and province," wrote Horsmanden,

[might] be warned to keep themselves upon a strict guard against these enemies of their own household, since we know what they

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<sup>1</sup>  
Horsmanden, "Preface," 11.

<sup>2</sup>  
"Journal of Proceedings," 53.



are capable of; for it was notorious, that those among them, who had the kindest masters, who fared best, and had the most liberty, nay, that those in whom their masters placed the greatest confidence, insomuch, that they would even have put their own swords into their hands, in the expectation of being defended by them..., did nevertheless turn out the greatest villains.<sup>1</sup>

As evidence of this, Horsmanden pointed to the recently discovered mischief. From the petty act of sneaking a drink, blacks had gone on in groups to talk (whether idly or not) of burning the town.

"[O]n a Sunday afternoon, a month before the firing of the fort, over a bowl of punch...at Hughson's," confessed Quack, "[others] voted him..., as having a wife in the fort to be the person who should fire the fort, Sandy, and Jack, Codweis'; Caesar, and Guy, Horsfield's; were to assist him in it."<sup>2</sup> Whether or not they got around to doing it, the talk was contagious.

Sawney told Sarah "at the pump in the neighbourhood.... G-d d--n all the white people; that if he had it in his power, he would set them all on fire."<sup>3</sup> Apparently he tried. He threw "fire over alderman Bancker's fence into his yard," and three times he

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 82; quotation, "Preface," 12.

<sup>2</sup> "Journal of Proceedings," 97.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 59.

set fire to his master's house. Each time his master discovered and extinguished the fire and resolved finally to send Sawney away to Albany. Diana "put fire in the shingles of Mr. Machado's house," according to Sawney; and, "in a passion, because her mistress was angry with her, took her own young child from her breast, and laid it in the cold, so that it froze to death."<sup>1</sup>

Thievery added to the recalcitrance. Blacks were not simply pilfering, they were organized in an underground called "the Geneva Club." As the story of how it got that name indicated, the club was not a recent venture in 1741. "It happened about five or six years ago," the story went, that

a cellar of one Baker, a tavern keeper in this city, had one night been broken open, and robbed of some Geneva [gin]; many of the parties concerned were detected, viz. several negroes, of which Caesar and Prince were two principals; and all that were discovered were chastised at the public whipping-post. From thence...they became distinguished among each other by the name of the Geneva Club.<sup>2</sup>

Not only was the club long established, it had contacts to dispose of whatever stolen goods the blacks could not use immediately.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 78.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 61-62, for comments on the club, see 102, 196, 259, 353.



Hughson fitted in there; he was a fence and, in part, hanged for a conviction "of having feloniously received...divers stolen goods, knowing them to be stolen."<sup>1</sup>

Again Hughson was not alone. Several other whites--John Romme, a shoemaker and alehouse keeper, John Coffin, a peddler, and William Kane, a soldier, among others--also acted as fences. Romme apparently handled much business. He got off lightly with "transportation from the province" probably because "he had a great many friends in town," as he said, "and the best in the place would stand by him."<sup>2</sup> Apparently they did, including a relative, alderman William Romme.

"[A]t several times," according to one report, John Romme had got from blacks "goods of several kinds."<sup>3</sup> For instance, once he received "fifty or sixty firkins of butter," after "making a bargain with Caesar to get him as much butter as he could, and he was to give him fifteen shillings a firkin for it; but Caesar insisted on twenty."<sup>4</sup> Also it was said at one point

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<sup>1</sup>  
Horsmanden, "Introduction," 31; "Journal of Proceedings," 39-46, 60-74.

<sup>2</sup>  
"Journal of Proceedings," 55, 68-70.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., 67.

<sup>4</sup>  
Ibid.

That the cloth coat Romme has now upon his back, with a cape to it, was stolen by Caesar from a countryman's boat near Hughson's...; [and] Romme gave Caesar ten shillings for it.<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion the members of the Geneva Club had been busy elsewhere. "Caesar and Prince," according to one of the many reports against them, "had stolen twenty pieces of eight out of Ellis' boat, and a new shirt and a pair of new stockings."<sup>2</sup> Besides, there were Hoggs' robbery and the robberies during the fires.

The crimes of Caesar and Prince, the recalcitrance of Sawney and Diana, and the host of other illegal activities by blacks indicated that in their own ways at least some slaves were changing the circumstances of enslavement. The crimes and the damage blacks did in the City during 1741 were not passive acts. The actions were exerted against the restraints and regulations of enslavement. In fact, slave misbehavior often brought some of those restraints and regulations to nought. The actions restrained oppression. Even if only temporarily, the actions immediately altered some of the

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 70.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid.



circumstances of enslavement. It might be argued that the actions were merely accommodation, but the content and results the actions produced reveal them as a form of protest.<sup>1</sup>

Usually "revolt" strikes a more responsive chord among people; almost always "slave revolt" tickles more ears than "slave protest." The former conveys a sense of definite, direct, and forceful action. The latter sounds too much like a whining complaint. Certainly it sounds inadequate as a means of overthrowing slavery--immediately or ultimately. Protest is not, after all, rebellion.<sup>2</sup>

Further, the manner of black protest was peculiar for the time--but so was their situation. The more usual methods of protest were closed to slaves. To petition, to speak out publicly as a group or to send representatives to the authorities implied the recognition or, at least, the presumption of some rights that would be honored. After solidification of the slave status in colonial America generally, as in New York after recodification of the slave

status, slaves sought justice, and tried other legal

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Several of the studies in Joseph R. Gusfield (ed.), Protest, Reform and Revolt: A Reader in Social Movements (New York, 1970), are suggestive of the concept of protest expressed here. Also see Ted Gurr, Why Men Rebel (Princeton, 1970), and Carl Friedrich, The New Belief in the Common Man (Boston, 1942), esp., 157-161 and 163-171.

2

See for example, Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts; and, George Fredrickson and Christopher Lasch, "Resistance to Slavery," Civil War History, 13 (1967), 315-329.

code following the plot of 1712, slaves had few, if any, recognized rights, and those they might have been allowed were subject to the rights of masters. This left the slave with little leeway for common protest.<sup>1</sup>

The most that a slave could reasonably expect from usual forms of protest was treatment conforming to the very rules and customs of slavery being challenged. If a slave presumed more, there was likely to be a rude awakening. The case of Antonio de St. Bendito, Antonio de la Cruz, Pablo Ventura Angel, Juan de la Sylva, and Augustine Gutierrez--known in New York as "the Spanish negroes"--well illustrate this.

Among the crew of the Spanish ship seized in 1740 by Captain John Lush, the black Spaniards--because of their color--were declared lawful prize by the Admiralty Court at New York and sold in town as slaves while the more light-complexioned members of the crew were kept in jail as prisoners of war. The "Spanish negroes" petitioned, cited law, spoke of justice, and tried other legal means. In New York society their color nullified those means of protest. No one responded seriously to their protestations: that is, no did anything about their status and condition. The five Spaniards were black, without proof that they were free, and they

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<sup>1</sup>  
"Journal of Proceedings," 89-93.



were treated as slaves. That was the most protest through usual means would get them--an assurance that their enslavement was legal. Consequently, protest suggested something different to blacks. To be effective, blacks needed something other than the usual methods of the society.<sup>1</sup>

The system saw to it, however, that few circumstances helped blacks to protest. The mechanisms of social control were consciously arranged to give slaves as little opportunity and as few resources as possible. Public practice was against black protest. Wherever blacks were supervised, their overt actions were circumscribed. This allowed covert action as a more probable alternative for protest.<sup>2</sup>

In New York, blacks slowly, quietly, secretly took liberties denied to them. It was clear in 1741 that they evaded curfew, assembled unlawfully, travelled without permission almost at will in the City, enjoyed unlawful entertainment, consorted illegally with other persons, stole, and occasionally set fires. In short, they

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"Journal of Proceedings," 155; see Olson, "Slave Code in Colonial New York." On introduction of "Spanish negroes," see above, Ch. 2.

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Col. Laws N.Y., I, 519-523; II, 679-688. See Aptheker's chapter, "The Machinery of Control," in American Negro Slave Revolts.

clearly countervailed structures of social control, eluded restraint and punishment, and slipped occasionally from their shackles. In this, though, they were doing what most persons oppressed in a society do. They tried to change what they could, leave what they could not, and understand the difference between the two. They were attempting to reform some of the immediate circumstances of their lives.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On this notion, see Raymond and Alice Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," Journal of Negro History, 27 (1942), 388-419.



3.

A further question emerges here: could slavery have been reformed? As enslavement was a manner of living characterized by specific sets of circumstances, there were aspects short of its abolition which might have been improved--even from the slave's viewpoint. Abuses such as harsh whippings and malpractices such as neglect of genuine illness, might have been stopped. Improvements might have been made, for example, in the quantity and quality of food, clothing and shelter. Corruptions such as sexual violations might have been eradicated.<sup>1</sup>

Even where extremes of misuse did not occur, resentment of real or imagined wrongs existed. Cuffee, for instance, resented that "a great many people had too much, and others so little."<sup>2</sup> Quaco resented being kept from his wife by the lieutenant governor. Caesar resented lack of complete personal freedom. Slaves entertained at the "disorderly houses," those who stole, or consorted

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On conditions of slavery in New York, see below Ch. 6. Also see Olson, "Social Aspects of Slave Life in New York," Journal of Negro History, 26 (1941), 66-77. More generally on treatment, see various slave narratives, such as Gilbert Osofsky, Puttin on Ole Massa (New York, 1969); Arna Bontemps, Great Slave Narratives (Boston, 1969). For a view of slave in New York, although neither contemporary with 1741, see Austin Steward, Twenty-two Years a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman (New York, 1857), and Sarah Bradford, Harriet Tubman (several editions), in connection with which, see the Editors of Ebony, The Negro Handbook (Chicago, 1966), 390.

2

"Journal of Proceedings," 39.

with white prostitutes, and those who committed other "mischief," resented social repression of their basic human urges.<sup>1</sup>

As long as society denied the basic human needs of slaves room for reform existed, and slaves sought these needs however they could. Immediately, of course, their efforts netted nothing more than a drink of whiskey, feminine companionship, laughter, more clothes, spending money, or simply the satisfaction of doing something prohibited. Yet, these actions became a first step on a journey to rebellion. A little change whetted the appetite for more.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps it was not intentional, but in adjusting their grievances in the manner they did, blacks got caught on a growing progression of complaint and resentment. Enslavement supposedly was not harsh in New York. The extremities of the condition reportedly were few. Still slavery was slavery. The essence of its oppression was unchanged: a person was owned, divested of all freedom and personal rights, and made subject to the will of another person. In a phrase, liberty was denied. In piecemeal fashion New York's blacks sought to realize liberty.<sup>3</sup>

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Ibid., 82-86.

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"Preface," 11-12.

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See Fredrickson and Lasch, "Resistance to Slavery," 315-329.



The same acts of stealth by which blacks sought to evade the system of social control led them to a confrontation with it. Neither fearless nor audacious, acts of stealth still challenged authority and demonstrated active opposition to enslavement. Although the means were covert and the immediate intention was narrowly focused, the tendency of the actions made part of the system of enslavement less effective.<sup>1</sup> This brought blacks face to face with the power of coercion.

Force was essential after that point. Force ultimately would be required to overcome enslavement. Sustained force would be necessary to maintain liberty. Coercion enslaved blacks and kept them enslaved; to end slavement, blacks had to end that coercion. This might have been done by destroying the source of coercion or by making it ineffective or inoperative. The latter two seemed easier, although neither actually ended enslavement. Only by directly counteracting coercion with opposing power could enslavement completely be ended. The system had to be torn down and its mechanisms ruined. Its directors and supporters had to be killed. Its foundations had to be wrecked and its principles

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<sup>1</sup> Bauers, "Day to Day Resistance;" and, Melville Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (New York, 1941), esp., 95-105.

eradicated. It was a nihilistic solution: by demolishing the whole structure blacks could have completely liberated themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Blacks in New York City talked about such a solution during 1741. According to Sawney, "about fourteen days before the fort was burnt," the Spanish Negroes said

that if the Captain [Lush] would not send them back to their own country, they would ruin all the city; and the first house they could burn should be the Captain's, for they did not care what they did. [D]--n that son of a b---h, they would make a devil of him.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after being clubbed over the head by a sentry and thrown out into the street when he attempted, against the lieutenant governor's orders, to see his wife at the Fort, Quack also spoke strongly. "[A]bout two days before the fort was burnt," Quack told Fortune "that in a few days there would be great alterations in the fort,... that [is,] the fort would be burnt," and he (Quack) was going to do it.<sup>3</sup> Caesar was not reported as saying

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<sup>1</sup> See literature surveying and analyzing revolt by slaves, for instance, the compilation in John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier and Elliott Rudwick (eds.), American Slavery: The Question of Resistance (Belmont, Calif., 1971); and Marion Kilson, "Toward Freedom: An Analysis of Slave Revolts in the United States," Phylon, 25 (1964), 175-187.

<sup>2</sup> "Journal of Proceedings," 105-106.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 75.



much, but he did "pay Hughson twelve pounds in eight shilling Spanish pieces,... in order to buy guns." And the goods were delivered: "Hughson... went abroad with his boat, and was absent three days, or thereabouts, and brought back with him seven or eight guns, three pistols and four swords."<sup>1</sup>

This purchase of guns and talk of setting fire, along with the actions by blacks to evade the system of social control so as to snatch more liberty, suggest at least two levels of black protest in colonial New York City and a connection between them. One level of protest--the more usual and more easily accomplished--was piecemeal adjustment of the oppressive circumstances that characterized the lives of black persons. The other level was an attack aimed at the fundamental nature and source of the oppressive circumstance. Between the two levels flowed a frustration that grew progressively from protest, to reform, to rebellion.

The levels and the progression between them point to the phenomenon of rising expectation and the result produced by repression. Enslavement deprived blacks of all rights and privileges. As they regained either or both, they reformed their condition. This, however, only ameliorated the accidents of slavery. It did nothing to change the essence. Regardless of how well fed, clothed and

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Ibid., 65.

housed, or how infrequently whipped, a slave was a slave. Judging from Caesar, Cuffee, Prince, Quack and other blacks enslaved to the richest and most indulgent New Yorkers, enslavement was still despicable and blacks continued to despise it. "To be their own masters," as one slave phrased it, blacks had to do more than extend their rights and privileges under slavery. They had to overthrow it.<sup>1</sup>

That was not a simple act. It involved more than murdering slaveholders or eluding authority or even escaping the locale. Slavery put blacks against the whole society, its entire structure. No one man enslaved blacks, nor was it an individual law or even all the laws that referred specifically to the Negroes: it was the entire community and everything in it.

For blacks to overpower the City of New York was visionary. "They whetted their knives...and some said their knives were sharp enough to cut off a white man's head; [and] that they would kill the white men."<sup>2</sup> Blacks had done some damage by setting fires--

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 82; on discussion of revolution of rising expectation, see Eugene Stanley, The Future of Underdeveloped Countries (New York, 1961), 13-20.

<sup>2</sup> "Journal of Proceedings," 105-106.



as undoubtedly Sawney did, and Quack and Cuffee each said they had.<sup>1</sup> Certainly Caesar had something in mind when he got those "seven or eight guns, three pistols and four swords."<sup>2</sup> What he fully intended to do, and whether the other blacks were going to translate their talk into cutting white people's throats and burning down New York was not demonstrated by completion of those actions. No throats were cut, and while there was a rash of fires in which one white died, the town was not burned down.

The Conspiracy of 1741 showed whites that after almost a century they could not yet keep slaves from disruptive behavior that weakened slavery, sapped the society's resolve to maintain it, and prompted public opinion adverse to the institution. From one perspective, many of the ways in which slaves resisted amounted to guerrilla tactics. In the open the enslaved had few chances against the society. When slaves were not in the open, the society found itself at a loss, and many whites did not want to continue to sustain that loss. That sentiment showed in desires to get rid of problems with the enslaved by either changing or ending slavery.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., 59, 77-78, 96-100.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., 65.

The enslaved again had succeeded and failed in resisting enslavement. They had wrecked parts of the system of controls designed to keep them in place. That was the element of success. But, in all their actions they remained enslaved. That was the element of failure.



## VI

## THE PERENNIAL PROBLEM: CRIME AND SLAVES

1.

The Conspiracy of 1741 was an omen and a challenge, particularly to municipal and provincial authorities such as the attorney general and the Supreme Court of Judicature, who were obliged to administer law and order. Meeting on 23 April 1741, the second and third Justices of the Supreme Court and "all the gentlemen of law in the town" decided to have special proceedings and preventive measures against "this...scheme of villainy in which white people were confederated with them [slaves]."<sup>1</sup> "From the nature of such a conjunction," the authorities thought "there was reason to apprehend there was a conspiracy of deeper design and more dangerous contrivance than the slaves themselves were capable of."<sup>2</sup> Thus a counterplot developed: "it was thought a matter that required great secrecy, as well as the utmost diligence in conduct of the inquiry concerning it."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Horsmanden, "Journal of Proceedings," 43-44, in Thomas J. Davis (ed.), The New York Conspiracy (Boston, 1971).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

To assure it would be handled by those who had a correct conception of the Conspiracy,

It was judged most advisable, as there was an absolute necessity that a matter of this nature and consequence should be fathomed as soon as possible, that it should be taken under care of the Supreme Court.

Charging the Grand Jury investigating the Conspiracy, Second Justice Frederick Philipse displayed the "correct conception" of the Conspiracy--the fundamental nature of the society was at stake, "We have the happiness of living under a government which exceeds all others in the excellency of its constitution and laws," said Philipse. He warned,

if those to whom the execution of them [the laws] is committed, do not exert themselves in a conscientious discharge of their respective duties, such laws which were intended for a terror to the evildoer, and a protection to the good, will become a dead letter, and our most excellent constitution turned into anarchy and confusion.<sup>2</sup>

As perceived by the Justice, that was the situation then.

"Great numbers of persons," observed assistant prosecutor John Smith, "have been concerned in the plot; some whites, and many blacks."<sup>3</sup> He found the reported object frightful:

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Ibid.

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Ibid., 36.

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Ibid., 91.



that the white men should all be killed, and the women become a prey to the rapacious lust of these villains! That these slaves should thereby establish themselves in peace and freedom in the plundered wealth of their slaughtered masters!<sup>1</sup>

"It is hard to say," concluded Smith, "whether the wickedness or the folly of this design is the greater."<sup>2</sup>

In attempting to figure out "the greater," Smith and others revealed their notions of slavery, the society and the enslaved. To Smith, the Conspiracy showed "the monstrous ingratitude of this black tribe."<sup>3</sup> He asserted, "their slavery among us is generally softened with great indulgence." Further, he said, "they live without care, and are commonly better fed and clothed, and put to less labour, than the poor of most Christian countries."<sup>4</sup> Continuing, Smith stated a common conception, although obviously contradictory considering the circumstances:

the [the enslaved blacks] are really more happy in this place, than in the midst of the continual plunder, cruelty and rapine of their native countries, but notwithstanding all the kindness and tenderness with which they have been

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1  
Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

treated amongst us, yet this is the second attempt [alluding to 1712] of the same kind, that this brutish and bloody species of mankind have made within one age.<sup>1</sup>

Making his reference more specific, Smith said, "that justice that was provoked [during 1712], and the innocent blood that was spilt in your streets, should have been a warning to all that had come after them." As far as Smith could see, the warning had not been properly considered. "[W]e shall not be quite safe," Smith concluded, "till that wicked race are under more restraint or their number greatly reduced within this city." Thus, he exhorted, "do what in you lies to rid this country of some of the vilest creatures in it."<sup>2</sup>

Third Justice Daniel Horsmanden almost parroted Smith. Referring to blacks as "abject wretches" and "the outcasts of the nations of the earth," Horsmanden declared:

though you are called slaves in this country[,]  
yet you are all far, very far from the condition  
of other slaves in other countries; nay, your  
lot is superior to that of thousands of white  
people.<sup>3</sup>

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Ibid.

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Ibid.; also on the disadvantages "that attend the too great Importation of Negroes and Convicts," see Journal of the Legislative Council of the Colony of New York, 1691-1775 (2 vols.; Albany, 1861), I, 630-632.

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"Journal of Proceedings," 94.



"You are furnished," he continued, "with all the necessities of life, meat, drink, and clothing, without care, in a much better manner than you could provide for yourselves, were you at liberty." "You have grown," Horsmanden told the slaves, "wanton with excess of liberty, and your idleness has proved your ruin, having given you the opportunities of forming this villainous and detestable conspiracy; a scheme compounded of the blackest and foulest vices, treachery, bloodthirstiness and ingratitude."<sup>1</sup>

Incredulous that slaves could think of rebellion, Horsmanden asked, "what could it be expected to end in, in the account of any rational and considerate person among you, but your own destruction?" Horsmanden queried further, "what...could prompt you to undertake so vile, so wicked, so monstrous, so execrable and hellish a scheme, as to murder and destroy your own masters and benefactors?"<sup>2</sup> Ben, sentenced to death as a conspirator, answered the third Justice in a single phrase: "to be free!"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.; for similarity of these views with those in the Old South, see Eric McKittrick, Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), esp., 34-69.

<sup>2</sup> "Journal of Proceedings," 94.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 65.

2.

On 15 February 1742 apprehensions of slave violence again flared up in New York City. About six o'clock that morning, a shed adjoining the house of Walter Hyer burned in a fire that seemed purposely set. The first action of whites was to inquire "what negroes were in the neighbourhood, and their characters, whereby the most suspicious might be laid hold of and examined." Shortly thereafter, Widow Brandt's twenty-one year old slave Tom was taken into custody and later hanged. Some in the City wanted another "negar hunt" with massive retaliations as the year before, but the City was tired of that. New Yorkers were weary of trying to control their slaves.<sup>1</sup>

Slave crime continued. It was the same routine: stealing, absconding, rowdyism, drunkenness, breaking curfew. The task was not to outlaw such actions, but to stop them. The City had an adequate code defining slave crime. Yet the elaborate system of controls was ineffective.

The problem laid not simply with slaves. Regulations were poorly enforced and the Supreme Court of Judicature publicly censured the City for its laxity. Owners and others in the City found it convenient to allow slaves to violate some measures of

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Davis (ed.), The New York Conspiracy, 389-392.



control in return for satisfactory service or for a share in the loot from slave crime. Municipal authorities had so many other problems they hardly could focus the necessary attention on slaves.

Officials had tried to make owners police slaves better by levying a fine on the master for every crime a slave committed. The "tippling houses" so "destructive to the morals of servants and slaves" were decried. Yet the problem persisted. In effect, the difficulty with slave crime was in its roots in the City's structure and society: it was a general and a special social problem.<sup>1</sup>

Experience showed New York City that regulating slaves was, in itself, a special problem and, also, that it was part of a general problem. Three types of specific laws singled out slaves as a special problem; one type dealt with definition of the slave status, the second type provided for policing slaves, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1675-1776 (8 vols.; New York, 1905), III, 277-278; Minutes of the Supreme Court of Judicature, 1673-1701, New York Historical Society, Collections, 45 (1912), 192; New York Weekly Journal, 6 March 1737/1738; The Colonial Laws of New York from the year 1664 to the Revolution (5 vols.; Albany, 1894), I, 519-521; Charles Lincoln (ed.), Messages from the Governors, 1638-1906 (10 vols.; Albany, 1909), I, 659-660; New York Weekly Journal, 9 August 1742; especially on City ordinances, see Laws, Orders & Ordinances Established by the Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen and Assistants of the City of New-York convened in Common Council, for the Good Rule and Government of the Said City (New York, 1732), 37 folio pages, New York Historical Society; also see M.C.C., IV, 77-121. Also, see McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York, ch. 5, esp., 85-88; Edwin Olson, "Negro Slavery in New York, 1626-1827," (Ph.d. dissertation, New York University, 1938), ch. 4.

third type directed the relationships of slaves as persons and as personality. The principles for regulation all were enacted in the City prior to 1712. Thereafter acts re-established original statutes that lapsed, or furnished stipulations for new circumstances. To operate effectively the regulation of slaves involved the entire community, black and white. Hence, the regulation of slaves was entangled in the general problem of controlling conduct throughout the society, and of adjusting particular controls to meet change.<sup>1</sup>

The first aspect of the general problem--controlling conduct in the community--was difficult enough for New York City during the eighteenth century. The crux of the issue was enforcing observance of law. The City essentially relied on the deterrent of exemplary punishment or wrongdoings. Such an approach kept citizens from crime mostly by fear of being discovered. As long as the population

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The New York Slave Code has been much studied; the discussion here is not intended as a re-analysis of the code. The first types of law already were discussed in Chapter 1. Type two was discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. The third type of laws was discussed especially in Chapter 3. See Edwin Olson, "The Slave Code in Colonial New York," Journal of Negro History, 29 (1944), 147-165; A. Judd Northrup, "Slavery in Colonial New York," State Library Bulletin, History, No. 2 (1900), 266-301; and, Edgar J. McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York (Syracuse, 1966), 79-100. On City ordinances, see Laws, Orders and Ordinances Established by the Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen and Assistants of the City of New-York convened in Common Council, for the Good Rule and Government of the Said City, and M.C.C., IV, 77-121.



of the City remained within a small homogeneous community, law enforcement by deterrent worked relatively effectively. As the population increased in number and diversity, however, law enforcement could rely less on citizens to expose each others' crimes or to fear discovery and consequent punishment of crimes. A more effective police system was necessary to prevent wrongdoing where possible or, in any case, to detect wrongdoers so they would be punished.

The City was not prepared for the police task. The result put public morals and safety in jeopardy. In a real sense the citizens felt unprotected from disorder, and they complained. For example, one petition from townsmen demanded that the city government

suppress those Gaming Houses, especially all Billyard, Truck Tables and Cards &c: to which are owing the Impovishment and Ruin of many in this place, who having contracted a habit of Gaming in their Youth, have not been able to Leave it till Reduced to meer Beggery.<sup>1</sup>

Also, "decent" citizens complained about prostitution. The authorities attempted "to Restrain Disorderly and Unlawful Houses," but it took more than ordinances. The Common Council could more easily make actions illegal than stop them. For instance, raids by the agents

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M.C.C., IV, 311-312.

of social control on "disorderly houses," often touched off a free-for-all, and not infrequently, the raiders were routed.<sup>1</sup>

New York's citizens did not feel particularly safe from danger when the municipal police power was overwhelmed by a disorderly crowd. Yet, two other governmental departments were available to maintain order. The garrison of royal troops at Fort George were available for protection, although mostly from foreign threats or in dire internal emergencies such as during the Uprising of 1712. The militia were available for major domestic disturbances, again, such as during the Uprising of 1712 and, also, during the Conspiracy of 1741. Still, the City had little organized to maintain order under everyday circumstances. At night the streets seldom were safe.<sup>2</sup>

Moonlight was about the only illumination on the streets at night until 1752. That year a small beginning was made on street-lighting at public expense with the purchase and erection of three

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Laws N.Y., III, 460-462 and, Julius Goebel and T. Raymond Naughton, Law Enforcement in Colonial New York (New York, 1944). For an example of one such raid, see New York Post-Boy, 11 August 1755.

<sup>2</sup> See William Peterson and George Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality (New York, 1917), 96-108; and, Carl Bridenbaugh, Cities in the Wilderness: Urban Life in America, 1625-1742 (New York, 1938), and his Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776 (New York, 1955), 113, 136, 241, 301-303.



lamps at the entrances of City-Hall. Nine years later, receiving permission for a levy for the purpose, the City established lamp-posts and lamplighters. This lighting was not uniform in the neighborhoods, nor very reliable. As the New York Mercury reported:

In the most dark and Stormy Nights, when Lamps are most Necessary, they are the latest and worst lighted, and sometimes not at all and particularly Wednesday Night, when there was hardly any passing without lighted in the city.<sup>1</sup>

Nor were lamps secure from vandalism. "[S]everal of the Glass-Lamps put up about this City," reported the New York Post-Boy in February 1752, "were taken down by persons unknown, and left whole in the Meal-Market altogether. It is thought to be done by some daring Rakes, in order to convince the Owners, how easy those Lamps might be demolished without Discovery." Lamps, however, when lit simply allowed visibility: the City still needed some force to watch the streets.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> New York Mercury, 7 February 1763. On beginnings of street lighting, see M.C.C., V, 358; and for levy, ibid., VI, 334, 343, esp., 276; also, Col. Laws N.Y., IV, 573-576.

<sup>2</sup> See New York Post-Boy, 3 February 1752; also see Col. Laws N.Y., III, 855-857; New York Post-Boy, 23 December 1751.

3.

A force called the "watch" was created to police. Its organization changed frequently during the years, the City continually experimenting to find an effective and inexpensive arrangement. In 1731 a "Citizen's Watch" was established, rotating assignments among all inhabitants living in the six wards south of Fresh Water Pond. According to the plan, every night from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m., during April thru September, and from 7 to 6 during October thru March, eight men supposedly were on watch duty. As can be imagined, duty was not popular and many tried to avoid it. Thus, fines of 40s were established for any one "Neglecting or Refusing to Watch as Aforesaid, or being Drunk on the said Watch, or leaving his watch before his time of Watching be expired."<sup>1</sup>

This system lasted only until November 1734. A new plan then set up a "constables watch" formed by a constable and two squads of five watchmen paid £5 10s for five months of serving alternate nights. In May 1735 the number of watchmen was reduced from ten to six and the period of hire dropped to two months. The number of watchmen continued to change: in 1738 it enlarged to twelve but in 1739 dropped to three.<sup>2</sup>

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M.C.C., IV, 126.

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On arrangements for 1734, see M.C.C., IV, 238-240. For 1735 ibid., 252-253; 1738, ibid., 449, 460.



Following the Conspiracy of 1741 and the military watch which lasted six months, thirty-six men in three shifts of eleven with an overseer, were placed on duty. When fear receded, however, so did this paid watch which cost the City £574 12s. So, in 1743 the "Citizen's Watch" returned. A military watch augmented it during the later years of King George's War, after which the City kept a watch of seven men. The New York Gazette characterized this watch as a "Parcel of idle, drunken, vigilant Snorers, who never quelled any nocturnal Tumult in their lives; but would, perhaps, be as ready to join in a Burglary as an Thief in Christendom."<sup>1</sup> Evident from that description, the City still was not secure from crime: morals and public safety were loose, providing slaves a climate opportune for diversion, evasion, and resistance. In 1755, for instance, upon a note that Negroes were becoming "insolent," a crackdown against them was ordered, with the militia standing guard.<sup>2</sup>

After apprehending criminals, the City had to secure them some place, and that became another problem. A "New Goal," finished during

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<sup>1</sup> New York Gazette, 21 February 1757; on military watch, see Col. Laws N.Y., III, 148-150; M.C.C., V, 163. On arrangements in 1741, ibid., 43-44, and 1742, ibid., 196.

<sup>2</sup> M.C.C., IV, 122-128: "A Law for Establishing and Better Ordering Night Watches." On fines, see ibid., 126 and V, 156, 182, 227.

1759 in the Fields at what now is the northeast corner of City Hall Park, replaced the basement of City-Hall as the municipal jail. Escapes had been frequent from there and complaints many:

Besides our Misfortune of Confinement,  
[wrote one group of inmates in 1751,]  
we are under great Necessity for want  
of Firing, not having at this time  
[March] one Stick to burn; nor have  
not had for several Days, and unless  
we are relieved by some charitably  
disposed Persons, we must unavoidably  
perish in this Place.<sup>1</sup>

By 1775 another structure was erected, on Murray Street--the infamous "Bridewell."

Expanding police powers and prisons cost the City money at a time when paying its expenses was becoming more difficult as other social problems also demanded money. For example, poor relief and public health became more costly, especially after the 1740s. The City was forced to erect a poorhouse in 1736, a house for persons with contagious diseases in 1758, and to give municipal aid to the New York Hospital founded in 1771. Fire hazards also multiplied, as did difficulties with water supply. In short, expanding public

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New York Post-Boy, 11 March 1751; evidently the prisoners were relieved, for they thanked their benefactors in verse, see ibid., 18 March 1751. On escapes, for examples, see M.C.C., III, 362-363, 370-372, 405-412. Note also that the Stockade at the Fort served as a jail, I.N.P. Stokes, Iconography of Manhattan Island (6 vols.; New York, 1915-1929), IV, 503. Also, Blake McKelvey, American Prisoners (Chicago, 1936); Bridenbaugh, Cities in Revolt, 118-119, 303-305.



services tremendously enlarged the expenses of operating the City government and by 1775 had the financial status of the City in dire straits, especially since the City often paid a disproportional one-third of Provincial taxes.<sup>1</sup> Yet, somehow the City had to meet the needs of its population.

The City's financial difficulties were not the only ones it faced. In 1775, the City's population was 11,000. By 1780, it had increased to 13,200. In 1785, it was 14,716. In 1790, it was 16,716. In 1795, it was 18,716. In 1800, it was 20,716. In 1805, it was 22,716. In 1810, it was 24,716. In 1815, it was 26,716. In 1820, it was 28,716. In 1825, it was 30,716. In 1830, it was 32,716. In 1835, it was 34,716. In 1840, it was 36,716. In 1845, it was 38,716. In 1850, it was 40,716. In 1855, it was 42,716. In 1860, it was 44,716. In 1865, it was 46,716. In 1870, it was 48,716. In 1875, it was 50,716. In 1880, it was 52,716. In 1885, it was 54,716. In 1890, it was 56,716. In 1895, it was 58,716. In 1900, it was 60,716. In 1905, it was 62,716. In 1910, it was 64,716. In 1915, it was 66,716. In 1920, it was 68,716. In 1925, it was 70,716. In 1930, it was 72,716. In 1935, it was 74,716. In 1940, it was 76,716. In 1945, it was 78,716. In 1950, it was 80,716. In 1955, it was 82,716. In 1960, it was 84,716. In 1965, it was 86,716. In 1970, it was 88,716. In 1975, it was 90,716. In 1980, it was 92,716. In 1985, it was 94,716. In 1990, it was 96,716. In 1995, it was 98,716. In 2000, it was 100,716. In 2005, it was 102,716. In 2010, it was 104,716. In 2015, it was 106,716. In 2020, it was 108,716.

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See Peterson and Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality, esp., 96-108; also see Frank H. Severance, "Some English Governors of New York and Their Part in the Development of the Colony," New York Historical Association, Proceedings, 17 (1909), esp., 137ff. On increase of beggars, see New York Gazette, 11-18 February 1734; on almshouse, see M.C.C., IV, 305, 307-311; 319, 324. On population during the period see O'Callaghan, Doc. Hist. N.Y., I, 471-474; on health and correction, see M.C.C., IV, 325-330, 429, VI, 124-125, 162, 203. On taxation see Bonomi, A Fictitious People, 86; E.D. Durand, Finances of New York City (New York, 1898). Col. Laws N.Y., II, 617; M.C.C., IV, 240-244, 250-251, 307-309; ibid., VI, 124-125, 162, 203; VII, 429.

4.

New York City's population grew markedly during the half-century preceding the War for American Independence. In 1723 the total population of the City was 7,243, including 1,362 "Negroes and other slaves." Eight years later the grand total was 8,622, with 1,577 "Blacks." In six more years the City grew in total population to 10,644, with 1,789 blacks. The next two decades were slow and showed some declines in growth. In 1746 the City's grand total was 11,717, including 2,444 blacks. Three years later, emerging from the throes of war, the number of blacks was down to 2,358, as the total population increased to 13,294. In the next census, taken in 1756, the number of whites and blacks decreased, as did the City's total--13,046. By 1771, however, a substantial increase showed: there were 18,726 whites, and 3,137 blacks--a total of 21,863. Thus, the City had enlarged almost three-fold since 1723, and had almost doubled since 1746 (see Table 6.1).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> O'Callaghan, Doc. Hist. N.Y., I, 471-474, 691, 693, 694, 695, 762-763. For description of New York during this period, see John Harris, Navigatium atque Itinerntium Bibliotheca or a Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels (2 vols.; New York, 1744-1748), esp., II, 286; Peter Kalm, Travels into North America; Containing Its Natural History, and a Circumstantial Account of its Plantations and Agriculture in General, with the Civil, Ecclesiastical and Commercial State of the Country, The Manners of the Inhabitants, and several curious and important remarks on various Subjects (2 vols.; Warrington and London, 1770-1771), esp., I, 236-260. Also, William Smith, The History of the Province of New York from the First Discovery to the Year MDCCXXXII (London, 1757), 187-196.



Table 6.1--New York City's total  
population, 1723-1771

Year	Population
1723	7,248
1731	8,622
1737	10,644
1746	11,717
1749	13,294
1756	13,046
1771	21,863

Source: Greene and Harrington, American  
Population, 96-102.

Transients, especially sailors, soldiers and slaves all shared in the City's growth and did more than their share in creating trouble for the authorities charged with keeping the peace. With the continuous and substantial influx of sailors, the waterfront was almost lost to morals and order: groggeries flourished there, as did gambling, vice, thefts, occasional murders, and frequent drunken brawls. The presence of British regulars also was a burden to New York's attempts to maintain order. Drunken, armed, and "of the meaner sort," soldiers continually created disorder, and sometimes their wives too, as shown early when the Mayor's Court held Frances Sutton, a soldier's wife, until she could be bound to

justices for her good Behavior and her  
Personal Appearance at the Next Sessions,  
for a Notorious assault and Breach of the  
Peace by her Committed upon Judith Roberts  
and Breaking of her Windows.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the press-gangs His Majesty used to take recruits for the ranks and to maintain ships with full complements often precipitated violence in the streets as colonials refused service.

Hobnobbing with the soldiers, sailors and other "rabble," slaves frequently were involved with them in crime--fighting, gambling, whoring, and stealing. That came out clearly in the Conspiracy of 1741. From one perspective, slaves did little more than avail themselves of liberties in situations already created by other misbehavior. Their position in the underworld of crime contributes to that impression. Usually slaves were not the ones profiting most from crime.

In crime as in the community at large, slaves were foot soldiers: their efforts enriched others. They stole, but generally the whites who fenced the goods got the profit. Tavern owners and "keepers of disorderly houses," took slaves' money, gave them credit, and encouraged them to steal more and come again. This presented

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Mayor's Court, 20 January 1724, quoted in Peterson and Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality, 109-110.



a special problem for authorities. Tolerating soldiers and sailors differed from putting up with slave misbehavior. Sailors were in-and-out of port which mitigated the problem of controlling them. Soldiers often resisted the curbs of municipal laws and were shielded from municipal punishment by provincial authorities. Slaves had no such protection.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 118, for example of reprieves.

## VII

## THE FORCES OF SLAVE LIFE

1.

Slave life in colonial New York City was generally confined by law, by the tradition of interaction between the enslaver and the enslaved, and by the reciprocal relationships between individual owner and individual slave. Slave life was also significantly influenced by sex, age, skill, length of service, location within the City, size of the owner's slaveholding, the owner's business and overall wealth.

A slave's situation often mirrored the place of the owner in society: the owners that were best off usually had the slaves that were best off--materially. Yet, few slaves differed significantly in social position. All followed a common pattern in friendships, family arrangements, and labor relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Slaves befriended others in the same holding, the neighboring slaves and, perhaps, if duties regularly called for presence in

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On the social aspects, see Edwin Olson, "Social Aspects of Slave Life in New York," Journal of Negro History, 26 (1941), 66-77. For comparison, see Walter Goodman, Black Bondage (New York, 1969), esp., chs. 2, "Word," and 3, "Play." Also, Gerald Mullin, Flight and Rebellion (New York, 1971), esp., ch. 2; John Blassingame, The Slave Community (New York, 1972), esp., ch. 1.



another area--such as the docks, the markets, or a shop--slaves that might be found there. These were the groups that drank and frolicked together. Often, too, they were bedfellows in misbehavior. Acquaintances, like friends, came from among freedmen in the neighborhood, from the job, and from previous encounters--either with another owner or at some other task. Associations with whites tended most often to be with the "meaner sort," such as soldiers, sailors, the poor, and the criminal. These connections especially proceeded from common patronage of taverns and "disorderly houses" throughout the City.<sup>1</sup>

With friends slaves sought pleasure which unavoidably included sex. Several "disorderly houses" catered to that pleasure, as did the many freelancers rampant in the City. As Dr. Alexander Hamilton reported in his Itinerarium, "whoring" flourished, with a "general rendezvous" at the Battery where, anytime after dusk, there waited a "good choice of pretty lasses, among them both Dutch and English."<sup>2</sup> Little evidence of discrimination in taking customers showed in the records. Money, not complexion or social status, gained entrance.

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Arthur Peterson and George Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality (New York, 1917), 309.

2

Alexander Hamilton, Itinerarium (New York, 1744), edited by Carl Bridenbaugh as Gentleman's Progress (Chapel Hill, 1948), 126.

Blacks had white women, and enslaved laid with free. This was an arrangement for enslaved men seeking pleasure and for some enslaved women seeking profit. Away from the cash nexus there also were sexual relationships, and these led to slave families.<sup>1</sup>

Standards always present problems in discussing the slave family. It was neither like the native African pattern nor like that of whites. Sui generis, the slave family shared traits both of the European and the African family, probably less from the influence of tradition than from the force of circumstances and the limited alternatives in which to group parents and children.

No such thing as the slave family existed according to law in colonial New York City. In effect, of course, the slave family could not be denied actual existence, for a family is not merely a legal creation. It is a physical and psychological connection between people. Further, a family does not necessarily mean people living together in the same house. Nor does it necessarily mean two parents and their children.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See E. Franklin Frazier, "The Negro Slave Family," Journal of Negro History, 15 (1930), 198-259, and his The Negro Family in the United States (Rev. ed.; New York, 1948), and his The Free Negro Family (Nashville, Tenn., 1932); and, Andrew Billingsley, Black Families in White America (Englewood Cliffs, 1968), esp., ch. 2, "Historical Backgrounds of the Negro Family." Blassingame, The Slave Community, ch. 3.

<sup>2</sup> On illegality of slave marriage in New York, see Col. Laws N.Y., V, 450; Edwin Olson, "Negro Slavery in New York, 1626-1827" (Ph.d.





in the most intimate partnership. Such families may only be distinguished by the frequency and continuance of contact between the mates or by their avoidance of another mate.

Having only one mate at a time as a measure of relationship is, however, problematic. During the course of life, slaves did change mates for various reasons, including circumstances beyond their control. That did not inevitably reflect a lack of seriousness in a relationship. Although the mores of the predominant society did not favor such practices at the time, in other societies changing mates by divorce or exchange occurred. Indeed, monogamy among the whites of colonial New York City did not mean marriage only once during life. Moreover, promiscuity had a place in colonial family relations.<sup>1</sup>

The second class of slave families involved parents and offspring. These families were more easily to distinguish. The

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On attachment between slave mates, see David Humphreys, An Account of the Endeavours Used by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts to Instruct the Negro Slaves in New York (London, 1730), esp., 7-9. See newspaper advertisements indicating bonds between mates: New York Weekly Post-Boy, 23 March 1746/1747, 21 March, 28 November 1765; New York Mercury, 5 March, 19 November 1770. Also see Revolutionary and Miscellaneous Papers in New York Historical Society Collections, 11-13 (1878-1880), 13, 355. For different interpretation, suggesting that "for most of the slaves family attachment were casual and impermanent" and that "most slaves regarded monogamy as an aberration when they regarded it at all," see McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York, 65-66. On native patterns of divorce and exchange, see Jacques Maquet, Civilizations of Black Africa (New York, 1972), esp., 79-80; Peter Farb, Man's Rise to Civilization (New York, 1968), esp., 66. Also, on patterns among whites, see Matteo Spalletta, "Divorce in Colonial New York," New York Historical Society Quarterly, 39 (1955), 422-440; Arthur W. Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family from Colonial



presence of children created a special relationship. If in the case of slave mates there was question about the bond of relationship, the presence of children from a slave union indicated the consummation of a familial relation. This class of family included three types of relations: both parents with offspring, a single parent with offspring or, third, simply siblings.<sup>1</sup>

Mothers, because of their predominant connection with the children, were the center of the slave family, just as in the West African family. Still, a child usually knew its father, and in fact, if male, frequently was referred to as his son--as for example "Peter's boy Cuffee." Enslaved fathers, on the average, did not live with mother and children; they were separate lots. Some enslaved fathers had children from two or three women; but the frequency of that pattern must be adjusted by sex ratio, differential morality, and relocation. Generally, barring interference from

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Times to the Present (3 vols.; Cleveland, 1917-1919), I, chs. 2-4. Also, David Rothman, "A Note on the Study of the Colonial Family," William and Mary Quarterly, 23 (1966), 627-643; and Blassingame, Slave Community, ch. 3.

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On connection to children, see New York Weekly Post-Boy, 9 April 1750. Also, Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States, chs. 2, 4 and 5. On family variations, see Andrew Billingsley, Black Families in White America (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), esp. 17.

masters or sale, slave mates producing children remained in union. If it were broken, children stayed or went with the mother, until ages twelve to fourteen years--that effectively was adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

While slave mothers determined their children's early life, and conscientious slave fathers contributed, it was the mother's owner who supported slave children. And not wishing to bear the cost, some owners discouraged female slaves from having children.<sup>2</sup>

In bearing children, enslaved females occasionally astounded people. One exceptionally fecund slave woman gave birth to forty-one children, and another to twenty-six. On the average over the colonial period slave women in New York City had fewer than two children. Some wanted no children and had none. Others, after having children, committed infanticide as did "Diana (Mr. Machado's negro)...[who] took her own young child from her breast, and laid it in the cold, [so] that it froze to death."<sup>3</sup>

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Franklin, The Negro Family, 17-36; Goodman, Black Bondage, 85-112; Olson, "Social Aspects of Slave Life in New York;" for similar data but different interpretation, see McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York, 64-65. On Cuffee's father, see Thomas J. Davis (ed.), The New York Conspiracy (Boston, 1971), 62.

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On problem with slave owners and child support, see for example, the New York Weekly Post-Boy, 17 May 1756, 10 January 1757, 4 September 1758, 28 November 1765, 7 May 1770; New York Mercury, 4 February 1774; also see McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York, 66.

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Davis (ed.), The New York Conspiracy, 87. For two other cases of mothers killing children, see Olson, "Negro Slavery in



The rate of child-bearing in colonial New York City may be crudely measured by the child-woman ratio (cwr) which fixes the relation between all persons under fourteen years of age and all adult females. Such a proportion only roughly expresses the rate of child-bearing. Migration, infant mortality and fatalities in child birth are not accounted in such an index. Yet it presents the information contained in available census data. Table 7.1 shows the ratio during the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century. It indicates a steady decrease in the ratio among whites and a fluctuation in the ratio among blacks which peaked around mid-century and then declined to its earlier level. The ratio among blacks averaged less than that among whites but the two became closer. Thus, New York City's women had fewer children to care for as the eighteenth century progressed and black women had the fewest children.

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New York," 101; E.B. O'Callaghan (ed.), Calendar of Historical Manuscripts in the Office of the Secretary of State (2 vols.; Albany, 1866), II, 4, 66-68. For case of forty-one children, see Lerone Bennett, Before the Mayflower (Baltimore, 1966), 85-86: the woman was not a New Yorker, but the case is illustrative; the mother of the twenty-six was a New Yorker, see New York Mercury, 15 February 1773.

Table 7.1--Child-Woman Ratio in  
New York City, 1703-1771

Year	Blacks	Ratio	Whites
1703	.8 (.833)		1.9 (1.905)
1723	1.0 (1.004)		1.6 (1.564)
1746	2.0 (2.028)		1.4 (1.425)
1749	1.5 (1.451)		1.4 (1.441)
1756	1.3 (1.310)		1.3 (1.259)
1771	1.0 (1.032)		1.3 (1.278)

Source: computed from Provincial Census Returns; see  
Greene and Harrington, American Population,  
88-102.

Rearing her children filled only part of the enslaved woman's life. While enslaved men often worked at the dock, as porters or craftsmen and helped around the house, in personal service or in the garden and stables, the female slave's labors were usually more consuming than the male's. Female slaves frequently did the household duties--cleaning, sewing, laundering, cooking, occasionally gardening--as well as the marketing, child-care, and personal service. Her privileges, particularly to travel or to be out of the house at night were fewer, as were tolerances of her drinking, gambling or other vices. On occasional nights she might be allowed male visitation,



according to the disposition and discretion of the owner and the size and arrangement of the house. Some owners provided separate slave quarters, either apart from the house, out of the way within it, or in the attic or cellar: such arrangements facilitated having company in an intimate setting. Where there was simply a bedroom next to the others or a cot, probably in the kitchen, chances of privacy were small.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On housing arrangements, see New York Weekly Journal, 21 June 1742; Edward Hall, Philipse Manor Hall (New York, 1912), esp., 110, 127; and Percy Van Epps, "Slavery in Early Glenville, New York," Sixth Report of the Town Historian, esp., 10.

2.

Intimacy between owner and slave in New York City is difficult to detail from existing records. Some owners undoubtedly adopted a patriarchal sense of slavery. An owner regarding slaves as part of the family with himself as head, was not necessarily more lenient. For treating slaves as children not always brought them blessings. To begin with, the child's lot in provincial times was not a feather-bed, and discipline was often severe. More directly, treating slaves as perennial children created delusions of childishness.<sup>1</sup>

Slaves responded varyingly. Some felt obligation to owners for kindly treatment. Nicholas Bayard's Ben displayed this, refusing to do mischief and reasoning to other slaves that, "his master do him good." A few slaves developed an unquestioning kind of steadfast devotion for owner and family. Commonly, respect of one sort or another appeared between slave and owner. Most slaves did their tasks and adhered to order so as to avoid punishment. After all, coercion maintained slavery and secured the presence of slaves as property.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On notion of slaves as perpetual children, see Kenneth Stampp, The Peculiar Institution (New York, 1959), 325-331, and Stanley Elkins, Slavery (Chicago, 1959), 86, 111-114. Curiously, Elkins while citing Stampp's work in other areas, does not give reference to his application of "infantilization." Also, see Alice M. Earle, Child Life in Colonial Days (New York, 1899).

<sup>2</sup> Davis (ed.), The New York Conspiracy, 204.



Owners needed to produce quality service from slaves.

Allowing liberties usually did the trick. In some instances, slaves shared in the owner's garden to supplement their diet and, through sale of produce, to provide spending money. Slaves sometimes could hire their labor for cash. Slaves highly skilled occupationally, bartered for terms of service and, on occasion, for manumission. Likewise, liquor, money, possessions (especially clothing), visitation privileges and promises of rewards--while not always in observance of law and, at times, in violation of it--successfully got slaves to perform better.<sup>1</sup>

Rewards for good service scaled down from manumission to the privileges just mentioned. None of these recompensed the slave for life and love partially or wholly lost, nor for a position in society that would be perpetual. And manumission was not always a favor. A mother put at liberty while her children--particularly if young--remained enslaved felt the act less generous. The old, freed from enslavement under guise of "years of faithful service," when actually owners wished simply to be rid of the burden of support and care, could hardly consider "freedom" kindly.

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<sup>1</sup> See Abraham Evertse Wendall's Day Book (1760-1793) in the Manuscript Collections of the New York Historical Society, particularly entries for 7 April 1768, 28 August and 19 September 1772; Thomas De Voe, The Market Book (2 vols.; New York, 1862), vol. I, passim, e.g., 256, 312. Papers of the Lloyd Family of the Manor of Queens Village, 1654-1826, in the New York Historical Society, Collections, 59-60 (1926-1927), passim, e.g., I, 334; H. St. Jean de Creve-Coeur, "New York City in 1712," Magazine of American History, II (1878), 749; M.C.C., IV, 479.

Old age showed, more than before, the precariousness of the slave's position at the mercy of the owner. Set on their own--maybe with a few dollars, maybe with nothing--the aged, particularly if childless, had little support. Many ended on the poor roles. A public outcry against the expenditure for these slaves and resulting restrictions on manumission (recall the provision in 1712 of £200 sureties for £20 per annum), reduced this abuse. Yet, owners who wanted to, evaded restrictions through deceptions or transportation of the persons to other areas. As the Assembly stated in 1773,

there have been repeated instances in which Owners of Slaves have obliged them after they are grown aged and decrepit, to go about begging for the common Necessaries of Life, whereby they have not only been reduced to the utmost Distress themselves but have become Burthens on the Humanity and Charity of others; and sometimes also such Owners by Collusive Bargains, have pretended to transfer the property of such Slaves to persons not able to maintain them, from which the like evil Consequences have followed.

So, the Assembly passed an act "For the Prevention...and effectually to suppress such unjust and inhuman practices."<sup>1</sup>

Long before old age, however, slaves realized that the premium of good service to owners counted more in the present than the future. Slaves measured premiums by the dimensions of daily life: according to the owner and family's behavior, food, drink, entertainment, medical care, and protection.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Col. Laws N.Y., V, 533-534. On Act of 1713, see above and ibid., I, 762.



Economic diversity and life style in the City dictated patterns of treatment different from the plantation regime. Feeding, clothing and sheltering slaves--since most of these things were shared with the owners--even if by hand-me-downs and leftovers, were of relatively reasonable quality. Slaves dressed well by most accounts: reportedly, shoemakers and tailors enjoyed a profitable business outfitting them.<sup>1</sup> Amusements for slaves were much the same as for others in the society, and often slaves enjoyed their owner's diversions--boating, dancing, gambling, horseback riding, hunting, and the like. Also, slaves had their own play (fiddling, storytelling and masquerading), and their holidays.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from common ailments forged by malingering, illness among slaves appeared not more frequent than among whites. Nor did contagious diseases take a markedly higher toll of slaves. Some of that may be explained epidemiologically by the fact that slaves were kept by a class in society relatively well-off. Dispersed in the same pattern

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On medical treatment, see Lloyd Family Papers, I, 309, 331, 334, II, 543; Inventory and Administration of the Estate of Adolphe Philipse, 1749-1763, Manuscript, New York Public Library, 19, 23; Richard B. Morris (ed.), Select Cases of the Mayor's Court of New York City 1674-1784 (Washington, 1935), 554-560; in addition, check John Duffy, Epidemics in Colonial America (Baton Rouge, 1953), Albert Deutsch, "The Sick Poor in Colonial Times," American Historical Review, 46 (1941), 560-579, and especially, Claude Heaton, "Medicine in New York during the English Colonial Period, 1664-1775," Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 17 (1945), 9-37.

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On holidays, see Olson, "Social Aspects of Slave Life in Colonial New York."

as that class, slaves might be more expected to follow its disease pattern. The records leave the impression that happened, for freedmen and the poor did not fare as well as slaves. In terms of other protection, owners frequently shielded slaves, even if it was not more than, for example, having a death sentence reduced from burning to hanging, as Chief Justice James DeLancey did in 1741 for his slave, Othello.<sup>1</sup>

Protection against the owner presented a different story. In theory, some guards for slaves existed. For example, it remained a capital offense for anyone, including an owner, to kill willfully a slave. Beyond that, the old royal instruction given to Governor Robert Hunter was in force to check excessive or malicious punishment. Short of taking "life or limb," owners had the backing of law in chastising slaves. When owners went further in punishment, however, little was done. John Van Zandt horsewhipped to death a slave of his caught out after dark by the "Night Watch" (for which Van Zandt was liable to a fine). A coroner's jury cleared Van Zandt of wrongdoing, finding

the Correction given by the Master was  
not the Cause of his [the slave's] death  
but that it was by the Visitation of God.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>

On Othello, see Davis (ed.), The New York Conspiracy, 321-325.

<sup>2</sup>

case. New York Weekly Journal, 5 January 1735-1736. For a similar case, but one in which the owner (William Pettit) was jailed, see New York Gazette, 17 December 1733. In reference to law and Royal Instructions, see Col. Laws N.Y., I, 157, 520 and N.Y. Col. Docs., III, 138; V, 138.



In the same way, owners neglected some of the physical needs of slaves. Owners were liable to a £10 fine if their slaves were reduced to begging. In a note not taken seriously, the Provincial Council asked slaves for reports of abusive treatment. Records show not one such report. Abuse was the owner's to give; the slave's redress usually was not the society but himself.<sup>1</sup>

Slaves in New York City had privileges outlawed elsewhere during the colonial period. One such privilege was education, but it did not go far. Some owners instructed slaves in the three R's, at times simply as a matter of course, but more often for application in their businesses. Other instruction usually aimed at religious purposes. The two schools established in the City for slaves during the colonial period both came through the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (referred to as the SPG). Elias Neau, mentioned in connection with the Uprising of 1712, conducted the first of these schools. His teaching mostly was catechetics. In 1760 the SPG opened another school in the City--the first then being defunct--to provide blacks with some elementary education. Reading, writing and arithmetic was taught and, in addition, girls learned

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<sup>1</sup> On begging, see Col. Laws N.Y., V, 533; in reference to the Provincial Council, see Cal. His. Mss., III, 371. On Spanish Negroes, see Davis (ed.), The New York Conspiracy, 117.

sewing. Resistance to this instruction followed from the beginning-- from owners uneasy with too much learning among slaves and from the enslaved, themselves, who saw hypocrisy in the overtones of instruction.<sup>1</sup>

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On SPG beginnings, see Gov. Cornbury to the Bishop of London in 1702, in M.C.C., II, 213, and agitation about Neau in 1703 and Licensing in 1704, Edward T. Corwin (ed.), Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York (7 vols.; Albany, 1901-1916), III, 1949, 1959; Doc. Hist. N.Y., III, 75, 78, 82, 84, 566; David Valentine, Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York (New York, 1862), 683-684. More completely, see the extract "An Account of the Endeavors Used by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, To Instruct the Negro Slaves in New York. Together with Two of Rp. Gibson's Letters on that Subject,; from Dr. David Humphrey's, Historical Account of the Incorporated Society from its Foundation of 1728 (London, 1730), a copy of the "Extract" is in Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. Also see Carter G. Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861 (New York, 1915); William Kemp, The Support of Schools in Colonial New York by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (New York, 1913); Frank Klingberg, Anglican Humanitarianism in Colonial New York (Philadelphia, 1940); C.E. Pierre, "The Work of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts among the Negroes in the Colonies," Journal of Negro History, 1 (1916), 349-360.



mightily in their own work and arrangement for leasing slaves significantly broadened the market and society at large, hiring out allowed persons--without investment to become slave owners--to utilize the fruits of slave labor. A contract could be made for any type of slave, with almost any skill, for any period--hour, day, week, month or even a year or more--and wages to the owner and, varyingly, food, clothing, and shelter to the slave. In 1731 the City ordered "a more strict hiring of Slaves." It also ordered that Negro, Mulatto and Indian slaves left out to hire within this City should be kept in a house at the Hall until such time as they are hired, and all persons may know where in this City their Occasions shall be discovered.<sup>2</sup>

147, 359, 151; Wendall's Day  
 April 1768, September 1771,  
 October 1773; New York Weekly  
 12 February 1749/1750,  
 28 February 1774, 6 March,

ch. 2.

Rates for such rentals were irregular and changed intermittently with each owner, the time of year, length of contract, level of slave skill, and with the personality of those involved--renter, owner and slave. The Papers of the Lloyd Family of the Manor of Queens Village showed slaves in 1695 hiring for £5 yearly. By 1725 the rate was £20. Females for domestic service hired in 1750 at 2s a day or 16s a month. Also slaves could be hired as sailors for 2.6s per day or 60s for a month. According to the Livingston Family Account Book, the rates of hired slave laborers trebled between 1720 and 1760, by which time the cost was £60 per annum. The New York Mercury indicated what happened after that: £100 was the minimum annual rates for mature male slaves and even those under 14 years of age earned up to £60 a year. Inflation accounted for perhaps a third of the increase, yet basically the spiralling cost reflected a sharp rise in demand. Approaching the War for Independence, demand for hiring slaves skyrocketed. With the demand, up went rates.<sup>1</sup>

Owners, almost needless to note, were doing well in this situation. As Lieutenant Governor James DeLancey (himself a slave

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Papers of the Lloyd Family, I, 147, 161, 258; Account Book of Thomas Witter, 1747-1768 in New York Historical Society, Manuscript, Collections, esp., January and July 1747, May 1750 and 25 January 1753; New York Mercury, 10 July 1780; Herman M. Stoker, "Wholesale Prices at New York City, 1720-1800," Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station Memoirs, No. 142 (Ithaca, 1931), esp., 201-202. Livingston Family Account Book, 1760-1787, New York Historical Society Manuscript Collections, p. 3.



owner) told the Assembly in 1755, "the owners of slaves reap such advantages that they cannot reasonably complain."<sup>1</sup> Looking at the daily wages of free labor that becomes clearer. John Pryor's accounts for 1760 show a daily wage of 5.6s for free workers--a rate of about £80 a year. Owning slaves, then, provided more than a nominal saving.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the profit of hiring out slaves dwarfed returns on many other investments. Jacobus Van Cortlandt received almost a 13% return on a £40 investment in a slave by hiring him out in 1695. The Lloyds got what amounted to a 29% return in 1725. By 1770 the annual returns were more than 33%.<sup>3</sup>

The social costs of hiring out or purchasing slaves increased as the eighteenth century progressed. Competition with free labor

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Lincoln (ed.), Messages from the Governors (10 vols.; Albany, 1909), I, 618.

<sup>2</sup> Account Book of John Pryor, 1762-1767, in New York Historical Society, Manuscript Collections, 10 April 1762; also see Thomas Witter's Wage Receipts for 1767. In a letter, James Murray indicated laborers received 4s 6d a week; a tailor, 20s for a suit of clothes, New York Gazette, 7 November 1737; also, see James Wilson (ed.), Memorial History of the City of New York (4 vols.; New York, 1892-1893), II, 202, 204.

<sup>3</sup> Letter Book of Jacobus Van Cortlandt, 1762-1769, in New York Public Library; Papers of the Lloyd Family, I, 307; New York Mercury, 10 July 1780. Livingston Family Account Book, 3. Cost and contract rates of slaves given. Percentage returned figured at contract rate for hiring out in relation to purchase price. This does not count owners' increase from inflation raising value of slave.

was increasing costs. This old story appeared earlier in complaints by porters and other tradesmen during the seventeenth century. In the 1730s the coopers complained loudly about slaves. George Clarke, the lieutenant governor, described the situation in 1737. The competition with slaves, he noted "force[s] many [white tradesmen] to leave us to seek their living in other countries." After midcentury, especially as the number of free laborers increased, sentiment also increased against "the pernicious custom of breeding slaves to trades whereby the honest and industrious tradesmen are reduced to poverty for want of employ."<sup>1</sup>

Counting free labor for hire as adult white males ages sixteen to sixty years, by 1771 the number in New York City had increased more than six fold during the eighteenth century. In 1703 there were 813 men in this category. By 1723 there were 1,460. In 1746 there were 2,097, and 2,765 in 1749. The number fell to 2,308 in 1756. In 1771, it was up to 5,083.

The adult white males also grew in proportion to the total population. Of the 3,745 whites in 1703, this category comprised 21.7%, and about the same percentage of the total population which included 630 slaves. By 1723, it comprised 24.8% of the white population, and 20.1% of the total population. In 1746, the percentages

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<sup>1</sup> Lincoln, Messages from the Governors, I, 260.



were 22.6 and 17.9. Three years later it jumped to 25.3 and 20.8, but receded in 1756 to 21.4 and 17.7. By 1771, the men comprised 27.1% of the white population, and 23.2% of the total population of the City (see Table 7.2).<sup>1</sup>

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Table 7.2--Adult White Males in New York City, 1703-1771

Year	Number	Percentage	
		of whites	of total population
1703	813	21.7	18.7
1723	1460	24.8	20.1
1746	2097	22.6	17.9
1749	2765	25.3	20.8
1756	2308	21.4	17.7
1771	5083	27.1	23.2

Source: Provincial Censuses; see Greene and Harrington, American Population, 90-102.

Black males, ages sixteen to sixty years, present a somewhat different pattern during the same period. In 1703 they formed 16.2% of all blacks in the City (see Table 7.3), and 2.3% of the total population. By 1723, the composition was 29.9% and 5.6%.

<sup>1</sup> These percentages and population figures are extrapolated from sources cited earlier. For verbal description by a contemporary, see Patrick M. Robert, A Tour through Part of the North Provinces of America, being a Series of Letters wrote on the Spot, in the Years 1774 and 1775, extract in Stokes, Iconography, IV, 861-862.

Table 7.3--Adult Black Males in New York City,  
1703-1771

Year	Number	Percentage of blacks	Percentage of total population
1703		16.2	
1723		29.9	2.3
1746		26.4	5.6
1749		25.8	5.5
1756		26.5	4.6
1771		28.4	4.6
			4.1

Source: Provincial Censuses; see Greene and Harrington, American Population, 90-102.

In 1746, the percentages were down slightly to 26.4% and 5.5%.

The three years until the next count changed the percentages to 25.8 and 4.6. The latter percentage remained unchanged for 1756,

but the percentage of men in the black population rose to 26.5%.

By 1771, a decline in the percentage of this category in the total population showed, as they were 4.1%, although their percentage of the black population was up to 28.4%.<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, the number of adult female blacks in the population remained higher, reflecting the influence of domestic service in the slave system and the comparatively fewer problems with controlling

<sup>1</sup>  
O'Callaghan (ed.), Doc. Hist. N.Y., I, 471-474, 691, 693, 694, 695, 762-763.



black women. Adult female blacks comprised 45.7% of all blacks in the City during 1703 (see Table 7.4), and they were 6.6% of the total population. Twenty years later the percentages were 34.9 and, still, 6.6. After another two decades (1746) the percentages were 23.3 and 4.9. The next census (1749) showed 29.6% and 5.3%. By 1756, the women had picked up to 30.5% and 5.3%. In 1771 they comprised 34.6% of the blacks and 5.0% of all the persons.<sup>1</sup>

Table 7.4--Adult Black Females in New York City, 1703-1771

Year	Number	Percentage	
		of blacks	of total population
1703	1,442	45.7	6.6
1723	1,061	34.9	6.6
1746	1,001	23.3	4.9
1749		29.6	5.3
1756		30.5	5.3
1771		34.6	5.0

Source: Provincial Censuses; see Greene and Harrington, American Population, 90-102.

New York City's share of the total number of slaves in the Province fell between 1703 and 1771 from 26.4% to 15.8% (see Table 7.5). The decline was not steady and appears even more erratic due to the incompleteness of some censuses. In 1723 the

<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid.

City held 42.9% of all slaves in New York. Eight years later (1731) the figure was 21.8%. In 1737 it had 19.2%, but 27.9% in 1746. In 1749 the percentage was down to 22.3, and by 1756 it had fallen to 16.9%. In 1771 it fell farther downward and continued on that path ever after.<sup>1</sup>

Table 7.5--New York City's share, in percentage, of all slaves in Province of New York, 1703-1771

Year	Share
1703	26.4
1723	42.9
1731	21.8
1737	19.2
1746	27.9
1749	22.3
1756	16.9
1771	15.8

Source: Provincial Censuses; see Greene and Harrington, American Population, 90-102.

Because of the inadequacy of records, no complete picture is available for the slave trade in colonial New York City. It need be remembered that as the City served as a port and market for distribution of black cargoes, not every slave reaching the City

<sup>1</sup>

Ibid.



remained as part of the domestic institution. Nevertheless, the extant figures display the trends and nature of the trade. Data from the Recorder of the port show 2,372 blacks--1,570 from the West Indies and 802 from Africa--arrived at the City between 1701 and 1726. From 1732 to 1754 another 1,138 slaves entered the port. Records, of course, are not available for the apparently many blacks smuggled into the City, particularly via Long Island and New Jersey.

The character of arrivals recorded exhibits the irregular nature of the slave trade to the City. Occasionally a slaver set in with a sizeable cargo. More usually the blacks arrived in small parcels as a minor part of a ship's cargo. For instance, Captain Johan Vanburgh brought four blacks for sale from a voyage to the West Indies during 1720. Between 1729 and 1765, the two-masted ship Othello delivered nearly one hundred-fifty slaves to the City by two and three per voyage. The sloop Deborah averaged two blacks a year between 1748 and 1763. During twenty years, by the same pattern, the Bentry brought the City seventy blacks.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For Collector's report see N.Y. Col. Docs., V, 814; also, see Sir John Werden to William Dyer, Collector at New York, ibid., III, 245-246; and, Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade in America (2 vols.; Washington, 1930-1935), II, 63, a report submitted in 1709 to the House of Commons which states in part that "the greatest part of the Negroes furnished to Virginia, Maryland, Carolina, and New York has been by Separate traders, and that not above two hundred have been sent to those Parts by the [Royal African] Company since their Establishment." On period from

Prices for blacks in New York City increased during the colonial period. Thomas DeVoe's Market Book quoted Robert Wooley's travel journal that in 1678 slaves in New York "could be purchased at from 30 to 40 pounds if they are grown there."<sup>1</sup> Isaac Bobin, secretary to the later lieutenant governor George Clarke, wrote in 1722 that a seventeen year old Negro girl could be purchased for £45. The next year he gave the same price for a twenty year old black woman who "speaks good English, [is of] Sound Limb, [and] understands everything belonging to Household affairs."<sup>2</sup> An inventory of the effect of Governor John Montgomerie in 1731 showed the following prices:<sup>3</sup>

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1732 to 1754, with gaps "from 1743 to 1748 and 1748 to 1753," see Morris, Government and Labor in Early America (New York, 1946), citing "incomplete Naval Office lists," n2, 315-316. On smuggling, see Col. Laws N.Y., II, 528-529, III, 965; Henry Cooley, A Study of Slavery in New Jersey (Baltimore, 1896); The Letter Book of John Watts, 1762-1765, in New York Historical Society, Collections, Historical Society: The Brig Othello, 1729-1765, the Sloop Deborah, 1748-1763; and, the Brig Bentry, 1742-1762.

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DeVoe, The Market Book, I, 58.

2

Letters of Isaac Bobin, Esq., Private Secretary to the Honorable George Clarke, Secretary of the Province of New York, 1718-1730 (Albany, 1872), 116, 152.

3

Original Manuscripts of Inventory in New York Public Library; also, see Stokes, Iconography, IV, pl. 37.



			190
a Negro Musitian Called Andrew			
a Negro Woman Called Betty	85 [£]	10 [s]	0 [p]
a Negro Boy Named Barbadoes	56	9	0
a Negro Boy Named Othello	52	0	0
a Negro Boy Called Pompey	46	0	0
a Mullatto Woman Called Emanda	46	0	0
a Negro Woman Nam'd Deliverance	41	0	0
1 D° Called Jenny	35	0	0
	30	4	0

Colonel Beverly Robinson, involved in settling claims on the value of slaves in 1776 (after the war had hit the City), thought a good Negro worth £50, and the average about £40.<sup>1</sup> Robinson's estimate perhaps reflecting his position as an adjuster, and certainly reflecting the chaos of war, was low.

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 Transcripts of the Manuscript Books of the Commission of Enquiry into the Losses of the American Loyalist and Examinations of the Commissioners in Nova Scotia and London, 1783-1790, in New York Public Library, 66 vols., I, 59-61.

## VIII

## THE GRADUAL ENDING

Justification and support of slavery in New York City dwindled rapidly after 1775.<sup>1</sup> The cardinal factors in the decrease were: first, the influence of the ideology of independence interacting with a century-old stream of religious opposition to slavery; second, the tumult of the War for Independence; third, the work of the New York Manumission Society; and, fourth, the pressure on slavery created after the war by the tremendous increases in the City's white population. Yet, it took a quarter-century for slavery's strength to waste away enough for the formal process of general emancipation in New York to begin. Moreover, while legislative action annulled the legal basis of the institution, many of the customs, practices and conditions it had generated continued to enslave blacks.

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The most complete account of the abolition of slavery in New York is, to date, contained in Arthur Zilversmit, The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North (New York, 1967).



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Opposition to slavery grew early in New York from religious sources.<sup>1</sup> The Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers, opened much of the protest following the lead from Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.<sup>2</sup> George Fox, the founder of the Friends, disapproved of the treatment of blacks as early as the 1650s.<sup>3</sup> In 1688 a group of Pennsylvania Quakers presented "The German Town Protest," condemning the "traffick of mens-bodies."<sup>4</sup> The "Protest" made the circuit from the Monthly to the Quarterly and, finally, to the Yearly Meeting at the city of brotherly love.<sup>5</sup>

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See John Cox, Jr., Quakerism in the City of New York, 1657-1930 (New York, 1930); Thomas E. Drake, Quakers and Slavery in America (New Haven, 1950); Mary S. Locke, Anti-slavery in America from the Introduction of African Slaves to the Prohibition of the Slave-Trade (Boston, 1901); Zilverstit, The First Emancipation, 55.

2

The Society of Friends, A Brief Statement of the Rise and Progress of the Testimony of the Religious Society of Friends, Against Slavery and the Slave Trade (Philadelphia, 1843), 7-9; Allan C. Thomas, "The Attitude of the Society of Friends Toward the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century," Papers of the American Society of Church History, 7 (1897), esp., 269-270.

3

[George Fox], Gospel, Family-Order, Being a Short Discourse Concerning the Ordering of Families, Both of Whites, Blacks and Indians (London, 1676), 12-16.

4

"The Germantown Protest," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 4 (1880), 28-30.

5

Ibid.; Drake, Quakers and Slavery, 11-13.

The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting "adjudged [the Protest] not to be so proper for this meeting to give a positive judgment in the case"--not at "the present."<sup>1</sup> In 1693 the Yearly Meeting heard the issue again raised by "An Exhortation & Caution to Friends Concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes."<sup>2</sup> By 1696 the Meeting counseled Quakers "not to encourage the bringing in of any more negroes."<sup>3</sup> Concerns such as these and that stirred in 1700 by Samuel Sewall's The Selling of Joseph provided background in which New Yorkers reviewed their practices.<sup>4</sup>

New York Friends felt uneasy enough with their involvement with slavery to seek "the sense of the Meeting in 1717." First, the Quarterly Meeting heard a concern about "byeing Negroes for slaves." Then the Yearly Meeting briefly considered the matter. But there

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.; Zilversmit, The First Emancipation, 56.

<sup>2</sup> "An Exhortation....," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 13 (1889), 265-270.

<sup>3</sup> Locke, Antislavery in America, 15-17.

<sup>4</sup> "The Diary of Samuel Sewall," Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections (5th ser.), VI, 16, 17-20; Ola Winslow, Samuel Sewall of Boston (New York, 1964), 162-168; Stanley Kaplan (ed.), The Selling of Joseph (Boston, 1971); "Letter-Book of Samuel Sewall," Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections (6th ser.), I, 326; also see John Saffin, A Brief and Candid Answer to...The Selling of Joseph (1701), in George Moore, Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts (New York, 1866); Lawrence W. Towner, "The Sewall-Saffin Dialogue on Slavery," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd. ser., 21 (1964), 40-52.



no consensus for action. Yet, several New York Friends were "fully satisfied" that slavery "was not Rite," and they said so publicly in 1718. Dissidents forced the Yearly Meeting to hear the issue again in 1719. This time there a clear conviction emerged--the slave trade was an abomination. Nonetheless, there remained little agreement on the more complicated question of what should be done about slaveholding.<sup>1</sup>

Not until the 1770s did consensus overcome reservations among New York Friends. In the intervening years antislavery grew throughout British America. For instance, in 1715 John Hepburn published The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule, or an Essay to Prove the Unlawfulness of Making Slaves of Men. In 1729 Ralph Sandiford described the offenses of slavery in A Brief Examination of the Practices of the Times. In 1730 Elihu Coleman called slavery a sin in A Testimony Against that Anti-Christian Practice of Making Slaves of Men. Benjamin Lay pushed the antislavery charges further in the 1730s; in fact, Lay's vehement denunciation of slaveholding went so far that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting made him

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<sup>1</sup>

Cox, Quakerism in the City of New York, 55-57.

an object of public censure. Yet, Lay's fervor anticipated intensified antislavery feeling.<sup>1</sup>

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Antislavery developed profoundly "in the context of awakening self-consciousness in America" which began on a wide scale during the 1740s with "The Great Awakening."<sup>2</sup> The compulsion "to do the thing that was right" kept Quakers questioning how other men could be made slaves.<sup>3</sup> And the contention of the Friends helped to force the question on the minds of other colonists.

No justifiable answer for slavery appeared--not race, not color, not cultural condition. "No better reason can be given for enslaving those of any color than such as baron Montesquieu has humorously given, wrote James Otis in 1764.

Does it follow that tis right to enslave  
a man because he is black? Will short  
curl'd hair like wool, instead of

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Drake, Quakers and Slavery, 29-46; Hepburn in American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings, 59 (1949), esp., 114; Robert Vaux, Memoirs of the Lives of Benjamin Lay and Ralph Sandiford (Philadelphia, 1815), esp., 16-33; Zilversmit, The First Emancipation, 65-70.

2

Jordan, White Over Black, 269-271. This paragraph draws heavily from Jordan's chapter 7.

3

Drake, Quakers and Slavery, 69. Also see John Woolman, Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes (Philadelphia, 1754); Amelia M. Gunmore (ed.), The Journals and Essays of John Woolman (Philadelphia, 1922), esp., 160-180; Sydney V. James, A People Among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth Century America (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 137, chs. 8-12; George S. Brookes, Friend Anthony Benezet (Philadelphia, 1937); Zilversmit, The First Emancipation, 72-80.



christian hair, as tis called by those, whose hearts are as hard as the nether millstone, help the argument? Can logical inference in favour of slavery, be drawn from a flat nose, or a short face?

Otis rhetorically asked.<sup>1</sup> "Some have been so grossly stupid as to assign colour as a mark for servitude," wrote another colonist. "This, if it could prove any thing would prove too much," he wrote.

It would establish...that all complexions but the fairest should be, in some degree deprived of liberty. That all black persons should be slaves, says Montesquieu, is as ridiculous as that law of a certain country, <sup>2</sup> that all red-haired persons should be hanged.

In short, as Winthrop Jordan summarized, "the logic of color seemed to run counter to...logic."<sup>3</sup> Nor did the cultural condition of blacks serve as a convincing argument for slavery.<sup>4</sup> "Their stupidity... in our plantations," wrote John Wesley of blacks, "is not natural; otherwise than it is the natural effect of their condition."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Otis, Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved, in Bernard Bailyn (ed.), Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776 (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), I, 229.

<sup>2</sup> "Thoughts upon the Enfranchisement of the Negroes," United States Magazine, I (1779), 487-488, quoted in Jordan, White Over Black, 278-279.

<sup>3</sup> Jordan, White Over Black, 279.

<sup>4</sup> See Anthony Benezet, Some Historical Account of Guinea, Its Situation, Produce and the General Disposition of Its Inhabitants. With an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Slave-Trade, Its Nature and Lamentable Effects (Philadelphia, 1711).

<sup>5</sup> Wesley, quoted in Jordan, White Over Black, 179-183.

steps against slavery quickened, but with measured results in New York. Friends led in the forefront. In 1759 the New York Yearly Meeting decried the slave trade. In 1762 the Meeting discouraged the importation and purchase of slaves. In both actions New York Friends lagged thirty years behind the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. By 1760 the Pennsylvanians had published a consensus for "a stop to the increase of the practice of importing, buying, selling, or keeping slaves." The time had not yet come when Quakers felt Truth obliged them to free their slaves; however, they thought more earnestly of that than ever before, and the New York Friends were rapidly closing the gaps between themselves and more advance antislavery advocates. In 1771, for instance, the New York Yearly Meeting moved from simply discouraging participation in slavery to advocating that Friends free their slaves. Moreover, the Meeting established a committee to work on persuading members to manumit slaves. By 1774 the Meeting threatened members with ridicule if they bought or sold slaves. Three years later, New York Quakers who bought or sold slaves faced ostracism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cox, Quakerism in New York, 58; Zilversmit, The First Emancipation, 80-81; Brief Statement of the Rise and Progress of the Testimony of the Religious Society of Friends against Slavery, 48; also see later discussions of "Quaker Freedom" in Leo Hirsch, "The Negro and New York, 1783-1865," Journal of Negro History, 16 (1931), esp., 385; McManus, Negro Slavery in New York, 159; Laws of the State of New York for 1789, ch. 27, provided for retroactive validation of manumission of slaves by Quakers who had not followed the State's stipulations for providing sureties and registration.



Many other New Yorkers followed close behind the Yearly Meeting. Arguments about independence exposed nagging inconsistencies for New Yorkers who wanted freedom for themselves while enslaving other men. The City's newspapers underscored the brutality of slavery, yet the attacks often were made at a distance.<sup>1</sup> It was easier to condemn practices in the West Indies or the Carolinas rather than in the City itself.<sup>2</sup> Still, on occasion, the message was very direct, as when the New York Weekly Post-Boy characterized slaves as "poor pagans whom Christians have thought fit to consider cattle."<sup>3</sup> But arguments alone could not put an end to slavery.

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<sup>1</sup> McManus, Negro Slavery in New York, 151.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the New York Pacquet, 11 July 1763.

<sup>3</sup> New York Weekly Post-Boy, 24 March 1760.

Arguments began action. The surge of antislavery sentiment supplied grounds for some owners to manumit slaves and for others to push for general emancipation. How many slaves were freed in New York City by manumission never will be known exactly; the records are too bare. Before surrendering the City in 1664 the Dutch had freed thirty to forty slaves who, along with freedmen moving from the countryside, generated a small free black community. An "Abstract of Instruments of Manumission on Record in the Office of the Register, New York County," shows only 12 manumissions during the whole colonial period, the earliest coming in 1712 and the last in 1776 (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1--Slave Manumissions in New York City,  
1712-1776

Year	Number
1712	1 female
1722	1 male
1736	1 male
1748	1 male
1751	1 male
1753	2 (a mother & child)
1758	1 male
1762	1 male
1769	2 (a mother & child)
1776	1 male

Source: Yoshpe, "Records of Slave Manumissions."



This certainly was not enough even to dent slavery in the City, even though the tempo picked up in later years.<sup>1</sup> More than private actions by owners was necessary to do away with the institution. Emancipation would have to be public and general.

By the outbreak of the War of Independence the proposition of general emancipation had support, but the detail of a plan had to be carefully thought out. Gouverneur Morris initiated the official deliberation on a proposal in the Spring of 1777 as the Provincial Congress attempted to draw up a constitution for the newly created State of New York. "As regard to the rights of human nature and the principles of our holy religion," Morris declared, "loudly call upon us to dispense the blessings of freedom to all mankind." Clearly that meant general emancipation of slaves, and Morris exhorted the Congress to "take the most effective measures consistent with public safety, and the private property of individuals, for abolishing domestic slavery." Morris did not expect the result to be immediate: "it would at present," he acknowledged, "be productive of great danger to liberate slaves within this State."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Harry Yoshpe, "Record of Slave Manumissions in New York during the Colonial and Early National Period," Journal of Negro History, 26 (1941), 78-107. Most of the manumissions were by will. At times, the freed person received property or a pension from the owner. For example, Cornelius Clapper gave his slave Mary his "dwelling house" and £600.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of New York Provincial Congress (2 vols.; Albany, 1842), I, 887, 889.

Nevertheless, he wanted the process of liberation started. The Congress took no action on the proposal, and further deliberation had to wait until the hostilities ended. Yet the war itself loosened the shackles of many slaves in New York City.

Fighting quickly disrupted the society and economy on which the slave system rested, and the City became a military post and refugee camp controlled by His Majesty's troops.<sup>1</sup> By 1776 much of the former population had deserted the City and left whole streets uninhabited. Authority was in the hands of the military. Troops requisitioned what they needed in supplies, shelter and services, and they confiscated the property of rebels. As a result, many slaves found themselves in a changed situation.

Some slaves were abandoned and, thus, virtually set free, first when the rebels fled after failing in the initial maneuvering for command of the City and, later, when the loyalists were forced to flee.<sup>2</sup> In addition, slaves found themselves in a disputed

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<sup>1</sup> Oscar T. Barck, Jr., New York City during the War for Independence: With Special Reference to the Period of British Occupation (New York, 1931); Wilbur Abbott, New York in the American Revolution (New York, 1929); T.J. Wertenbaker, Father Knickerbocker Rebels: New York City during the Revolution (New York, 1948); New York City the American Revolution, Being a Collection of Original Papers (now first published) from the Manuscripts in the Possession of the Mercantile Library Association of New York City (New York, 1861).

<sup>2</sup> Barck, New York City during the War, esp., 56-72; Wertenbaker, Father Knickerbocker Rebels, chs. 9-11; Abbott, New York during the Revolution, esp., 260-285; Thomas Jones, History of New York during the Revolutionary War (New York, 1879), I, 334.



position as the contention between the Crown and the rebellious colonists spread to the issue of slaves as property. For instance, in November 1775 the Earl of Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, set an example followed by a few years later by the King's authorities in New York. "I do hereby further declare," Dunmore proclaimed, "all indented servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining His Majesty's Troops."<sup>1</sup> In 1779, Sir Henry Clinton, then commander-in-chief of the King's forces in America, granted liberty to any slave who fled to the British.<sup>2</sup> And many slaves were fleeing.

Rebel New Yorkers thought the problem serious enough to give a special Commission for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies the task of preventing slave flight.<sup>3</sup> By 1781 the rebels in New York offered slaves liberty in exchange for three years of war service, and to encourage owners to consent to slaves joining in the fight for

## 1

Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., Dunmore's Proclamation of Emancipation (Charlottesville, N.C., 1941), the front piece contains a facsimile of the proclamation; Edward E. Curtis, The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution (New Haven, 1926), 51-80; Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution (Chapel Hill, 1961), 19-20. For service of slaves to His Majesty in New York, see Proceedings of a Board of General Officers of the British Army at New York, 1781, in the New York Historical Society, Collections, 49 (1916), 112, 118, 125-126, 130-131, 136-137, 141-142, 210. Also, see John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom (3rd. ed.; New York, 1967), 133.

## 2

Clinton issued his statement on 30 June 1779 from his headquarters at Philipsburg in Westchester County; see Rivington's Royal Gazette, 3 July 1779.

## 3

Victor Paltsits (ed.), Minutes of the Commissioners for

liberty, the authorities provided a five hundred acre bounty to an owner if his slave entered the service.<sup>1</sup> So, simply in being abandoned, by moving from one side to the other, or in service to either side, some slaves in New York City found emancipation.

Another boon for New York City slaves came at the close of the war. The British shipped thousands of slaves out of the City when they withdrew. By the official evacuation date of 30 November 1783, the British commissioners at New York had compiled a list of blacks taken away that included 1336 men, 914 women, and 750 children.<sup>2</sup> In addition to these blacks, hundreds of others left

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Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York (Albany, 1909-1910), I, 142-143; II, 454-455, 702-703.

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Laws of New York, 1781, ch. 32; McManus, *Negro Slavery in New York*, 157.

2

There were two official lists, one for the period from 23 April to 31 July 1783, and another from 31 July to 30 November 1783. The titles were "Book of Negroes Registered & Certified after having been inspected by the Commissioners appointed by His Excellency Sir Guy Carleton, K.B. General & Commander-in-Chief, on Board Sundry Vessels in which they were embarked Previous to the time for sailing from the Port of New York." See Wertenbaker, Father Knickerbocker Rebels, 262; Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution, 171-172.



the City without being formally registered.<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Quarles estimated that, including slaves not originally residents of the City, the British shipped 4,000 blacks out of New York harbor.<sup>2</sup> The policy of Sir Guy Carleton, the General in charge of the evacuation, was that all blacks with the British before 30 November 1782 (the date the provisional peace treaty was signed) were free, and the British relocated many in settlements in Canada and the West Indies. Also, slaves owned by loyalists but not evacuated with the British gained liberty in 1784 when the New York legislature made loyalist property forfeit and formally freed the abandoned slaves.<sup>3</sup>

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For the colonists concern about this issue, see Francis Wharton (ed.), The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States (6 vols.; Washington, D.C., 1889), VI, 453; Boudinot to Benjamin Franklin, 13 June 1783, in Jane J. Boudinot, The Life, Public Services, Addresses and Letters of Elias Boudinot, LLd., President of the Continental Congress (New York, 1896), II, 76, where Boudinot complains that the British are despoiling the property of New Yorkers by sending off their slaves by the hundreds. On relocation of former slaves by British, see Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution, 177-181.

2

Ibid., 172.

3

Laws of New York, 1781, ch. 32; Laws of New York, 1784, ch. 64; Harry Yoshpe, The Disposition of Loyalist Estates in the Southern District of New York (New York, 1939).

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The effect of these actions showed in the 1786 census: there were  
only 2,103 slaves in the City as compared with 3,137 in 1771.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
E.B. O'Callaghan (ed.), Documentary History of New York  
(4 vols.; Albany, 1849-1851), I, 697; F.B. Hough, A Census of  
the State of New York for 1855 (Albany, 1857), viii; Evarts  
B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, American Population Before  
the Federal Census of 1790 (New York, 1932), 102-104-105.



3. By 1786 the New York legislature had again deliberated on a general emancipation act. A bill introduced in 1785 with the support of an apparent majority provided freedom to all children born thereafter of an enslaved mother.<sup>1</sup> Such a proposal aimed to atrophy slavery by letting bondsmen die unreplaced. It was too slow a process for several Assemblymen from New York City to countenance, and led by Aaron Burr, the Tammany chief, they proposed full and immediate abolition.<sup>2</sup> The radical proposal lost, however, by a vote of 33-13. Even though the more moderate proposal passed consideration 36-11, a failure to compromise the radical and moderate positions threatened the entire project.

Much of the problem of compromise involved the future situation of freedmen more than the question of ending formal slavery.<sup>3</sup> Emancipation, of course, had social and political ramifications. Would blacks become full citizens? They had not been before. Could blacks vote or hold public office? The Assemblymen's answer was a clear "No."<sup>4</sup> Even radicals pushing to

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York, 25 February 1785; 8th Assembly, 2nd sess., 11-15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 48-49, 53-57, 59.

<sup>3</sup> Zilversmit, First Emancipation, 148-149.

<sup>4</sup> Journal of the Assembly, 26 March 1785, 62-64, 76-77, 84-86.

abolish slavery wanted restrictions on blacks. Indeed, several saw abolition as a restriction on blacks: without slavery, they argued, there would be no place in the society for blacks.<sup>1</sup> Abolition, then, was the first step in eliminating blacks.<sup>2</sup> To make that clear, the Assemblymen sought to disfranchise blacks. Also, intermarriage was prohibited. Nor could blacks testify in court against whites.<sup>3</sup>

The New York Senate initially rejected such restrictions and another impasse developed.<sup>4</sup> Both houses made concessions, however, and eliminated all restrictions except disfranchisement. Yet the Council of Revision, constitutionally empowered with a veto to oversee legislation, returned the bill with Chancellor R.R. Livingston's

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Ibid., 9, 12 March 1785, 53-79.

2

See Don B. Kates, "Abolition, Deportation, Integration: Attitudes toward Slavery in the Early Republic," Journal of Negro History, 53 (1968), 33-47; Leon F. Litwack, "The Abolitionist Dilemma: The Antislavery Movement and the Northern Negro," New England Quarterly, 34 (1961), 50-73.

3

Journal of the Assembly, 9, 12 March 1785, 48-86; Journal of the Senate, 12 March 1785, 39, 42-47, 55-56.

4

Ibid.



declaration that blacks could not "be deprived of...essential rights without shocking the principle of equal liberty which every page of the Constitution labors to enforce."<sup>1</sup> In spite of those words the legislature could not agree: the majority of politicians were not ready to give blacks political rights, and emancipation lost on that note--for the time being.<sup>2</sup>

Still, the legislature clearly opposed slavery in New York, and although it could not settle the larger issue of general emancipation, it did act on lesser matters. For instance, importation of slaves for sale was prohibited.<sup>3</sup> Blacks imported in violation of the 1785 law were automatically free and the importer faced a fine of £100. Even so, slaves could be brought into New York for private

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Quoted in Alfred B. Street, The Council of Revision of the State of New York (Albany, 1859), 268. The Council had the constitutional power to reject a bill and return it to the legislature where the refusal could be overridden by a simple majority vote of each house. Chancellor Livingston's position on blacks and slavery may be pursued further in George Dangerfield, Chancellor Robert R. Livingston of New York, 1746-1813 (New York, 1960), esp., 451. Also see New York Packet, 31 March 1785, which warned that "those who make slaves of the blacks will likewise of the whites."

2

Journal of the Senate, 21 March 1785, 55-56; Journal of the Assembly, 26 March 1785, 119-120.

3

Laws of New York, 1785, ch. 68, II, 120-121.

use and sold became automatically free.<sup>1</sup> Further, in 1788 a ban was placed on exporting slaves. Manumission was made easier; no bonds or sureties were required to free healthy slaves less than fifty years old.<sup>2</sup>

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Piecemeal actions bit into slavery but too little to cut deeply. Slaves were imported under the subterfuge of leases or contracts of ninety-nine year indenture.<sup>3</sup> Sale of slaves took place under the ruse of debt or bankruptcy. Illegal exportations were rampant, with demand in the South providing the lure of high profits. Manumission at times was used as a deception to keep blacks in virtual slavery. In short, the stopgap measures the legislature enacted were inadequate to resolve slavery's status. Two forces pushed further for a formal and final decision: one force, the New York Manumission Society, worked in a personal way; the other force, the influx of white population worked in an impersonal way.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 1788, ch. 40, II, 285-287.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Examples given in Minutes of the New York Manumission Society, in manuscript collection of the New-York Historical Society, original minute books and microfilm, 4, 15 February 1787, 24 September 1788, 20 August 1789. Also see cases reported in the City's newspapers; for example, see New York Gazetteer, 15 January 1787; New York Journal or the Weekly Register, 26 October, 9 November 1786.



The New York Manumission Society organized in January 1785 had support from prominent New Yorkers such as James Duane, Chancellor Livingston, Melancton Smith, John Jay and Alexander Hamilton and, also, from Quakers whose New York Monthly Meeting contributed five of the seventeen founders.<sup>1</sup> One of the first acts of the Society was to petition the State legislature for gradual emancipation.<sup>2</sup> But the general proposals that year lost, and the Society worked for limited gains and was influential in getting the legislation barring importations, slaves and exportations of slaves. In addition, the Society acted as a quasi-police patrol reporting violations of the laws. Yet, the Society's most important contributions lay in public relations: it kept emancipation in the public eye, and it worked at individual persuasion. Besides circulating petitions, the Society sponsored lectures and with prizes encouraged the writing of tracts against slavery; also it printed and distributed volumes of antislavery literature.<sup>3</sup> A standing committee worked

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<sup>1</sup> N.Y. Man. Soc., Minutes, I, 1-4; Cox, Quakerism in New York, 62.

<sup>2</sup> N.Y. Man. Soc., Minutes, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Moseley, "A History of the New York Manumission Society, 1785-1849" (Ph.d. dis., New York University, 1963), 381pp.

on an individual basis to persuade owners to free slaves, hoping by example and exhortation to "dispel the mist which Prejudice, self Interest and long Habit have raised."<sup>1</sup>

The Society also prevailed with more than persuasion upon those implicated in slavery. The prominence of its members lent unusual economic, political and social pressure to the Society. It used that influence in 1788, for example, to boycott merchants, auctioneers or anyone else involved in slave trading.<sup>2</sup> The Society influenced the press in 1790 to virtually stop taking advertisements to buy or sell slaves.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the same influence directed a newspaper campaign against slavery. These activities to shape public opinion hostile to slavery received more and more support from the community at large as the common interest of an increasing proportion of the rapidly rising white population opposed use of slaves.<sup>4</sup>

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N.Y. Man. Soc., Minutes, I, 21-23.

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Ibid., 20 November 1788; also see instructions for keeping a list of persons involved in slave trading, ibid., 18 May 1790.

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Ibid., 18 August 1790.

4

Moseley, "New York Manumission Society," 79-93.



The doom of slavery in New York City was writ large after 1790 on the increasingly frequent boats crowded with immigrants clamoring for opportunity which began with jobs. The number of whites in the City jumped at an annual percentage rate of 8.8, from 21,507 to 29,661--an addition of more than 2,000 a year--in the four years between 1786 and 1790. The City's white population was 54,133 in 1800: that was an increase of almost 2,500 a year and represented an annual growth of 6.2 percent (see table 8.2).

Table 8.2--New York City's White Population, 1771-1800

Year	Population
1771	18,726
1786	21,507
1790	29,661
1800	54,133

Source: Greene and Harrington, American Population, 102-105; Rosenwaike, Population History, 18.

Population growth had never been so numerous. The Embargo Act of 1807, the Nonintercourse Act, and the War of 1812 (during which a British fleet blockaded the harbor, forcing it to close for more than a year) stymied growth for more than a decade. Yet, by 1820 the number of whites in the City stood at 112,820.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See New York Secretary of State, Census of the State of New York for 1865 (Albany, 1867); F.B. Hough, Census of the State

The City's slave population was dwarfed by the rapid increase of whites. The number of slaves increased until 1800 but slowly receded thereafter (see Table 8.3). In 1790 there were 2,369 slaves in New York City. A decade later the slaves numbered 2,868.

Table 8.3--New York City's Slave Population,  
1771-1800

Year	Population
1771	
1786	3,137
1790	2,103
1800	2,369
	2,868

Source: Greene and Harrington, American Population, 102-105; Rosenwaike, Population History, 18.

In 1799 the first statewide Gradual Emancipation Act passed: it freed no slaves immediately, rather it provided that after 4 July 1799 no person could be born a slave in New York. Thus, natural increase of the number of slaves was prohibited. The Act had another effect; it formalized slavery's death, and after it the number of slaves in the City began to drop. In 1805 there were

of New York for 1855 (Albany, 1855), viii; Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, American Population before the Federal Census of 1790 (New York, 1935), 104-105; Ira Rosenwaike, Population History of New York City (Syracuse, 1972), 8, 18; and Julius W. Pratt, "The War of 1812," in History of the State of New York, ed. Alexander C. Flick (New York, 1934), V, 243-244.



2,048 slaves in the City--a loss of 820. During the next five years a loss of 362 slaves occurred, leaving the population in 1810 at 1,686. In 1816 the City had 617 slaves. Four years later it had 99 fewer.<sup>1</sup>

For the 518 blacks still enslaved in 1820, slavery in New York City was as real as ever. Nevertheless the institution was defunct. The network of conditions so essential to slavery no longer existed. Economically the City no longer needed the institution. The government, unlike the Dutch West India Company, had no use for slaves. Private business thrived on cheap, abundant white labor. Immigrant stocks filled the City's households as domestics. The foreign slave trade--prohibited during the Revolution and outlawed soon after--could not serve as a fillip, nor were there favorable investment prospects in owning slaves as had existed when hiring-out was in demand. Rather than a source of income, the institution became an expenditure, bringing owners of slaves taxes and labor problems which led to political troubles. White workers scraping for jobs resisted slavery at every turn and pushed legally, and at times physically, against the use of slaves. Slaveholders no longer had the political power of numbers or status-influence to maintain the institution. In the City's social arena the collective regard for slavery dropped sharply. The

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<sup>1</sup>  
Census of the State of New York for 1865, iii-iv; Rosenwaike, Population History of New York, 18; Laws of the State of New York, 1799, ch. 62.

ideologies of independence played some part in the decline, but more important was the absence of a need for slavery as an element of social control. The population balance dramatically minimized the real danger posed in the City by any conspiracy of formally unenslaved blacks. The numbers also removed many of the psychological worries over uncontrolled blacks. Yet, emotionally and culturally, whites felt uneasy with the obvious differences of black tastes, habits and refinement. Indeed, the most pressing social question about blacks in New York City was how to isolate them. Not only were white city-folk concerned with doing away with slaves as needless appendages, they wanted also to remove blacks as an unsociable element. Thus the slave system in the City, once an integral part of life and development, by the nineteenth century had few supports and fewer

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uses.

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For elaboration of the conditions described in this paragraph, see: Litwack, North of Slavery: The Negro and the Free States, 1790-1860 (Chicago, 1961); Rhoda G. Freeman, "The Free Negro in New York City in the Era before the Civil War" (Ph.d. dis., Columbia Univ., 1966); Herman D. Bloch, "The New York Negro's Battle for Political Rights, 1775-1865," International Review of Social History, 9 (1964), 65-81; Dixon Ryan Fox, The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York (New York, 1918), esp., 268-269, and his article, "The Negro Vote in Old New York," Political Science Quarterly, 32 (1917) esp., 256-257; Lorman Ratner, "Northern Concern for Social Order as a Cause for Rejecting Anti-Slavery, 1831-1840," Historian, 28 (1965), 1-18, and his book, Powder Keg: Northern Opposition to the Antislavery Movement, 1831-1840 (New York, 1968); Joseph G. Rayback "The American Workingman and the Antislavery Crusade," Journal of Economic History, 3 (1943), 152-163; and, Linda K. Kerber, "Abolitionists and Amalgamators: The New York City Race Riots of 1834," New York History, 48 (1967), 28-39.



## IX

## CONCLUSION

Negro slavery might never have increased in size and strength in colonial New York City if lots of white laborers had immigrated initially. But neither the Dutch nor the English in turn attracted enough of their own people to fulfill their expectations of profitable growth. So, each in their own time resorted to slavery to extend the economy.

The Dutch came to Manhattan without expecting to establish slavery even though they soon imported a couple dozen blacks. Circumstances altered their plans, however. They converted the colony from a fur-trading post to a center of commerce and settlement. In that shift slavery suggested itself as a temporary complement to colonization. Yet the increased interest in selling slaves to New Amsterdam signalled a failure to carry through settlement. The West India Company had been neglectful too long. Not until the end of the Thirty Years War (1648) and the consequent complications closing off their trade with the Spanish and English colonies did the Dutch concentrate on bringing slaves to Manhattan. By the time they plied several full black cargoes, however, the English had taken over.

But the English also suffered from a paucity of settlers and increasingly used slaves for labor. And while New York did not draw settlers in large numbers, slavery more and more became an integral part of the society. Shortly after midcentury, however, its fortune reversed. Victory in the French and Indian War (1754-1763) opened new land on the New York frontier and attracted settlers who funneled growth into New York City. Considerable as this growth was between 1763 and 1771, it did not displace slavery. While the proportion of slaves in the City's population had dipped by 1771, the actual number stood at its all time peak. Slaves still represented a large portion of the labor force. Moreover, rises in prices and wages made slaves ever more valuable to owners. In short, on the eve of the war which ended the colonial era, the condition of slavery in New York City was sound and its position was prosperous.

Yet the proportion of slaves in the City's population dropped precipitously after the War of Independence. During the colonial years it had remained fairly constant. It began the eighteenth century at 14 percent and on the eve of the war was about 17 percent. The difference between the highest and lowest proportions was less than 7 percent. But the hostilities and consequent evacuation of many blacks shrunk the slave population. Although it rose again in actual number by 1790 and continued to rise until passage of the Gradual Abolition Act in 1799, waves of white



immigrants covered the blacks. By 1786 slaves accounted for less than 7 percent of the City's population. They were even less in 1790 and 1800 (see Table 9.1).

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Table 9.1--Percentage of New York City's total population enslaved 1698-1800

Year	Percentage enslaved
1786 and service over	8.9
1790 and from compact	7.4
1800 and free.	5.0

Source: Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790 (New York, 1932), 88-105

The decrease in proportional population did not stem from any failure of slavery. The character of the institution remained consistent as it had during the colonial years. Female slaves outnumbered male slaves, supporting Phillips' contention that town slavery had a domestic character. After the War of Independence, slaves continued to perform myriad tasks in homes, in shops, in streets and markets, on docks and aboard ships. They still were the attendants and handy men of the society. However, whites without jobs despised them and their position while coveting their work.

Simply put, the population implosion of whites in New York City concluded the slavery of colonial times. The institution did not break down, it was crushed. Whites again asserted the predominance which formed the crux of black-white relations. Socially, whites thought their command and restraint of blacks indispensable if both were to occupy a single community. Economically, interdependence related the two. Whites organized the groups in that relation, making blacks dependent and, unwittingly, becoming dependent themselves, not simply on the labor and service exacted from slaves but also on a sense of identity derived from comparison of African and European, black and white, slave and free.

Slavery incorporated all that: it controlled status, association and production. Yet whites shared unequally in slavery. Laborers, for example, recoiled and resented competition with slaves and forced owners of slaves to surrender the control over slaves which curbed white labor by rivalry. White workingmen thus struck against Negro slavery to release themselves from restraint. They concurred in repression of blacks, and the same pressure they laid against slavery lobbied for segregation to take up the slack in control of blacks created by legal abolition.

The last state was worse than the first to some extent for blacks. Still not regarded as wholly persons, shunned in approved social contact, denied the rights of citizens, barred from churches



and schools, excluded from jobs and compelled to live and travel  
separate from others, blacks found that emancipation released them  
from only the legality of one kind of slavery.

## X

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## A Note on Sources

The material for this study comes from all sides of colonial New York City's society. Negro slavery passed into and affected almost every part of the City. The institution was part of the framework of life in the community. Slaves were a commonplace. Yet, because during much of the colonial period slavery's presence was neither novel nor exciting to curiosity, few people in the City offered lengthy observations or explanations of the institution or the persons involved in it. Most of the comments made about slavery or slaves often were in passing or restricted to some aspect immediately at hand. For instance, when a slave was purchased or sold, an owner might record the price and, occasionally, mention some personal characteristics of the bondsman. In fact, those persons--such as Abraham Wendall, John Pryor, Jacobus Van Cortlandt, or John Watts--whose business interests influenced them to be bookkeepers provide some of the most valuable information on slave prices, uses, habits, associations and skills.



The legal side of the community, concerned as it was with records, preserved the largest account of slavery and slave behavior. The Colonial Laws of New York from 1664 to the Revolution (5 vols.; Albany, 1894) gives the rules of conduct established in the community to deal with the practices of slavery and the personality of the slaves. An even more informative source on the conditions in the City is the Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1675-1776 (8 vols.; New York, 1905). It contains discussions of the problems in establishing and enforcing authority over slaves. To a lesser degree, such discussions occur in the Journal of the Votes and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Colony of New York, 1691-1765 (2 vols.; New York, 1764-1766), the Journal of the Votes and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Colony of New York, from 1766 to 1776 inclusive (Albany, 1820), and the Journal of the Legislative Council of the Colony of New York, 1691-1775 (2 vols.; Albany, 1861).

What is available of the court records of the City provides another valuable stream of information on slavery. The details found in the Minutes of the Supreme Court of Judicature, 1673-1701, in the New York Historical Society, Collections, 45 (1912), the Proceedings of the General Court of Assizes, 1680-1682, also in the New York Historical Society, Collections, 45 (1912), Charles M. Hough (ed.), Reports of Cases in the Vice Admiralty of the Province of New York and the Court of Admiralty of the State of New York,

1715-1788 (New Haven, 1925), and Richard B. Morris (ed.), Select Cases of the Mayor's Court of New York City, 1674-1784 (Washington, D.C., 1935) are important in developing the story of slavery in the City. A more general source of this kind also contains valuable pieces for this study: Helen T. Catterall (ed.), Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro (5 vols.; Washington, D.C., 1926-1937). One special source of important court proceedings involving slaves should also be mentioned here--Justice Daniel Horsmanden's compilation on the events in 1741, The New York Conspiracy (New York, 1744), edited with an introduction by Thomas J. Davis (Boston, 1971).

The colonial Newspapers of New York City, increasingly after 1750, pay dividends for the student interested in local slavery. Among the papers during the colonial period, the principal four are the New York Gazette (1726-1740, 1759-1767), the New York Weekly Journal (1733-1751, 1766-1777), the New York Weekly Post-Boy (1743-1773), and the New York Mercury (1752-1776). These weeklies often give indispensable narratives of events and they set a backdrop for the action. Further, the announcements and advertisements open a window to information on slaves and society. In addition to the weeklies in the City, another newspaper is important, particularly during the early part of the eighteenth century; founded in 1704, it was the first regularly issued newspaper in America--the Boston Weekly News-Letter.



Among the most important sources on slavery in New York City are several collections of documents edited by either or both Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow. The largest of these works is O'Callaghan and Fernow (eds.), Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York (15 vols.; Albany, 1856-1887). Indispensable for the Dutch period are O'Callaghan (ed.), Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 1638-1674 (Albany, 1868), Fernow (ed.), Minutes of the Orphanmasters Court of New Amsterdam (2 vols.; New York, 1907), Fernow (ed.), Records of New Amsterdam, 1653-1674 (7 vols.; New York, 1897), and O'Callaghan (ed.), Voyages of the Slavers St. John and Arms of Amsterdam 1659, 1663; with Additional Papers Illustrative of the Slave Trade Under the Dutch (Albany, 1867). Valuable on both the Dutch and English periods is O'Callaghan (ed.), Calendar of Historical Manuscripts in the Office of the Secretary of State (2 vols.; Albany, 1866). In addition to the editing of O'Callaghan and Fernow, two other compilations of sources are most useful: Edward T. Corwin (ed.), Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York (7 vols.; Albany, 1901-1916), and J. Franklin Jameson (ed.), Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664 (New York, 1909).

A handful of personal papers round out the essential primary material. The two most full examples of this type of source are given here. The Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden, 1711-1775 (9 vols.; New York, 1917-1923, 1934-1935), in the New York Historical Society, Collections, 50-56, 67-68, are valuable for information,

discussion of private considerations, and occasional insights into the institution. The Papers of the Lloyd Family of Queens Village (2 vols.; New York, 1926-1927), in the New York Historical Society, Collections, is especially rich in details on the business side of slavery and the owner's perspective.

In terms of secondary sources, Edgar J. McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York (Syracuse, 1966), and Edwin Olson, "Negro Slavery in New York, 1626-1827" (Ph.d. dissertation, New York University, 1938) contain the most information available previously on the institution in New York City. Their discussions are supplemented by a number of journal articles and an occasional Master's essay.

A larger set of secondary works also is significant for this study. American Negro slavery has been a much discussed subject in historiography. Because of their general influence, several works--although not on slavery in the time, place and conditions studied here--have provided important starting points or signposts. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips' American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime (New York, 1918) may always be a book any student of slavery in America has to grapple with. Two of Phillips' chapters--Six, "The Northern Colonies," and Twenty, "Town Slaves"--have especial importance as a contrasting interpretation of general influences and events that shaped slavery in colonial New York City. Kenneth M. Stampp's challenge of Phillips on a broad front of matters relating



to the antebellum South gave The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York, 1956) special meaning for this study. Stamp showed a different explanation of the expressions in the record of slavery and a different conception of the institution. Stanley Elkins, in Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago, 1959), probed the question of slavery in ways that stimulated innumerable questions here about the impression the institution made on the slave, and slaves' interaction with each other and the larger society. Of all the secondary works in this class, Richard C. Wade's Slavery in the Cities: The Antebellum South 1820-1860 (New York, 1964) came closest to the subject studied here. Wade's pioneering study of the urban institution set a framework for comparison. There are similarities and, of course, differences between slavery in colonial New York City and the institution in the six cities Wade studied.

Winthrop D. Jordan's White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill, 1968) ties slavery as an institution and, moreover, slaves as persons into the threads of the culture and society of colonial America. As such, Jordan's study provides a fundamental structure for understanding the meaning of the words and actions in New York City's records.

Histories of New York form another important set of secondary sources for this study. In terms of the larger New York, the first

three volumes of the History of the State of New York (10 vols.; New York, 1933-1937) edited by Alexander C. Flick have much material on the colonial period. Mary L. Booth's The History of the City of New York (2 vols.; New York, 1867), Martha Lamb's History of the City of New York (3 vols.; New York, 1896), and, Maria Van Rensselaer's History of the City of New York in the Seventeenth Century (2 vols.; New York, 1909) are of great worth in many ways. Also full of material are David T. Valentine's History of the City of New York (New York, 1853), and his annual compilation of the Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York (28 vols.; New York, 1900). Of invaluable assistance as both a history and as a starting point on primary materials is I.N. Phelps Stokes (ed.), Iconography of Manhattan Island (6 vols.; New York, 1915-1928). Also most important is Arthur Peterson and George Edwards, New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality (New York, 1917). Thomas Jones, History of New York during the Revolutionary War (2 vols.; New York, 1879), Wilbur C. Abbott's New York in the American Revolution (New York, 1929), Thomas J. Wertenbaker's Father Knickerbocker Rebels: New York City during the Revolution (New York, 1948), and Oscar T. Barck's New York City during the War for Independence (New York, 1931) report the turmoil of the City in the struggle to end the colonial period.

Sidney I. Pomerantz, New York, An American City, 1783-1802 (New York, 1938) extends the detailed information on the City beyond the period of study here. Arthur Zilversmit's The First Emancipation:



The Abolition of Slavery in the North (Chicago, 1967) traces, from the early eighteenth century to the end, the discussion that eventually culminated in abolition of slavery in New York, thus, making that task less burdensome here. Leon F. Litwack's North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860 (Chicago, 1961), now supplemented by other studies, describes vividly the Negro's lot in New York immediately after slavery.

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